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# INDIA

## INTRODUCTION

It is midday on the Red Sea. There is light, light everywhere, so much light that cries of admiration and astonishment are forced from us ; it is as if we issue from gloom into a clear air of boundless space. The passage from our Northern Autumn to the perpetual Summer that reigns here, is made almost imperceptibly by our modern ships that do not heed the wind. Silvery crested waves dance on the blue waters, and the sky seems more distant from the earth ; the clouds, too, have more definite form and are further off ; new depths of space become apparent, and our horizon is extended.

It seems as though our eyes could appreciate new forms and colours in the increasing brightness which we had been unable to perceive before. From what a land of shadows we must have come, and what can this festival of light be that has sprung on us suddenly and unbidden ?

A melancholy brightness pours relentlessly on this land of tombs, this country thick with dust of by-gone races ; but we forget it when we reach our northern clime, and are surprised to find it there once more on our return. Its rays shine constantly on the hot and languid gulfs, and on their sand or granite shores ; it bathes the ruins and that world of dead stones which guard the ancestral faith and the secrets of those the Bible tells us of. This melancholy light is ever present, just as it must have been



in the old, sacred times, and these things give our narrow imagination a sense of infinity, and tell of a time without beginning or end. The biblical times, however, whose antiquity inspires our trust, are but of yesterday when we look back on the history of the world, fearful in the immensity of the past. This superb and intoxicating brightness is but the passing effect of our slowly decaying little sun upon a favoured zone of our still smaller earth, an earth that nestles close to him, as if frightened by the vast and chill orbits of the other planets.

The blue sky too, enwoven with the phantasy of passing clouds, that looks so deep, is but a thin, deceptive veil that serves to screen the yawning space behind. No, this is all nothing, only the space behind is real.

This empty space, this black abyss into which worlds ceaselessly fall, this kingdom that knows neither commencement nor decay, is the one eternal reality.

I must yet spend some seven or eight days amidst the shining blue of heaven and sky before I reach my journey's end. I make my way to India, the cradle of human faith and thought, with nameless dread, fearing that I may find nothing but a cruel and final deception.

I have not come here to make a trifling call, but to ask or beg the keepers of the Aryan wisdom to give me their belief in the lasting duration of the soul in place of the ineffable Christian faith which has vanished from my soul.

The day declines in wondrous splendour. The sun that draws us with him in the madness of his eternal wandering will soon have passed from our view. Our side of the world will turn towards that deep space, towards that land of shadow which the transparencies of the night air will let us see more clearly. But now the magic of the evening, with the burning rays of coppery rose, steals on us. In the east a chain of desolate mountains, whose granite slopes

glow like a furnace, rise from the sea. They are Sinai, Serbal, and Horeb, and the feeling of religious respect, which centuries have impressed upon our race, invades us once more.

The burning summits do not linger long, for the sun has sunk beneath the waters and the evening enchantment is over. Sinai, Serbal, and Horeb fade in the twilight, and are no longer distinguishable. Were they other than crests of jagged rock, idealized in our minds by the superb poetry of Exodus? Vast and calm night will soon restore all things to their true proportions, for space is already filled by legions of wandering suns which make me think of the black emptiness into which they and we are falling. I dream, too, of the miserable fate of our little planets chained to a sun that they can never hope to reach, ever attempting to narrow the orbits of their mad circlings, instead of plunging into space as do the more glorious suns.

A cloudless limpidity spreads from the zenith to the horizon, and the limitless void into which myriads of worlds fall (like sparks from a rain of fire) is unbared before our eyes.

A sense of alleviation comes from the starry night, like some breath of tenderness or pity that is poured into a pardoned soul.

My God! If the Indian sages that I seek could but convince me that I might find pardon and pity too.



# THE BURIED CITY



## CHAPTER I

### THE BURIED CITY

INDIA at last, with its forests and its j  
dawns on a forest of vegetation, an  
greenery ; whilst a boundless plain  
silence stretches from my feet to the

I watch the light dawning on this  
of green from the summit of a hill t  
island out of the plains. It is India  
the jungles, though veiled in mist.  
Ceylon, sheltered by interlacing tree  
of profoundest peace : it is the plac  
vellous Anuradhapura stood—the  
buried in a night of leaves more th  
years ago. The day breaks slowly thro  
thick with storm and gloom. The  
striking now in France, but here th  
this region of crumbling ruins to th

Where can the wonderful town be  
like a sailor searching from the mast  
nothing of human origin is visible. I  
trees everywhere, trees in serried ran  
which loses itself in illimitable distar  
there are lakes, inhabited by crocodil  
wild elephants come at dusk to drink.  
and the jungles the morning call c  
But are there no traces of the mar

Here and there, however, are sc  
and wooded hills, which rise in a  
fashion above the leafy plains. Th  
of old temples and giant dagabas, k  
before the reign of Christ ; the fores

<sup>1</sup> This is the literal translation of the In  
hapura was destroyed at the commenceme  
great Malabar invasion.

to destroy them, but has wrapped them in its green winding-sheet, covering them gradually with its soil, its roots, its monkeys, and its trailing growths. The place where men worshipped in the earliest times of Buddha is still nobly marked, and the sacred city which slumbers under all these overhanging branches is still here.

Even this hill on which I stand was once a sacred dagaba—built by myriads of the faithful in honour of their prophet, the forerunner and brother of Jesus.

The pediment is guarded by a row of elephants carved in stone, and by gods whose features time has now obliterated. What a delirium of prayer and adoration, and what a din of crashing music must have daily filled this temple in the olden times!

“The Temples and the Palaces of Anuradhapura are numberless, and their golden cupolas and pavilions shimmer in the sun. In the streets are crowds of soldiers armed with bows and arrows. Elephants, horses, chariots, and countless multitudes pass in a continual turmoil. There are jugglers, dancers, and musicians from many lands, whose timbals gleam with golden ornaments.”

Now there is silence, shadow, and green night; men have passed away and the forest has closed on everything. The wakening morning shines on all these buried ruins as calmly as it shone on the virgin forest in the first dawns of creation.

Before visiting the mainland, I must wait some days in Ceylon for the reply of a noble Maharajah whose guest I am to be, and I have preferred to seek shelter here, rather than in the vulgar towns of the coast.

I had to leave Kandy (the home of the old Cingalese kings) before daybreak, travelling through the region of the great palms, where all the magnificence of the equatorial land is unfurled. After midday the appearance of the country changes, feathered palms and areca trees gradually disappear. Doubtless we have entered into a colder zone, for the forests resemble our own more closely. The little coach travels through an incessant, warm, and scented rain,

drawn by horses which are changed every few miles. Sometimes we gallop along the streaming road, or fall into an obstinate trot, broken by ugly rushes.

More than once we have to jump down, because some half-trained brute threatens to destroy everything. Two Indians drive our ever-changing team; one holds the reins, whilst the other is ready to jump down should danger threaten. A third blows a horn as we pass through villages scattered amongst tree palms, or warns the slowly-moving zebu carts. We should have reached our destination at eight o'clock, but the storms constantly increase our delay.

Towards evening villages become rarer, and the forest is more dense. There are no more of those cleared spaces which looked so small and so lost by the side of the all-conquering forest; and our trumpeter has no longer need to play for any one.

The palms have altogether disappeared, and now that the day has declined I should have said that we were in some lonely European land where a perpetual summer reigns. It is true that the tangle of climbing plants is more luxuriant, and from time to time we pass a flowering cactus, or some great red lily with twisted petals, or gorgeous butterfly chased by a more gorgeous bird, which tell us that this is not our home. But the illusion of our country and our woods ever returns.

Since sunset we have passed neither village nor trace of man; silence reigns in the green depths through which our road takes its interminable course, and we are travelling much faster now in the warm caressing rain that still beats on us.

As darkness comes on, an insect humming gradually rises from the ground and makes the silence more perceptible. On the damp forest soil myriads of wings keep up a noisy music; such music as has been heard nightly since the birth of the world.

The sky is covered, and the night quite dark. For hours we have trotted rapidly between two great rows of trees, which resemble overgrown and fantastic hedges in some boundless park. Sometimes great



black animals loom out of the shadows and bar our further progress, harmless and stupid buffaloes which we must drive aside with whips and cries. The road once more resumes its dull monotony, and silence is only broken by joyous insect rustlings.

One thinks of the forest denizens sheltered by the calm of night, large and small wild creatures on the watch or on the prowl, so many pricked ears, and so many dilated eyes watching the least movement in the shadowy wood.

The clearing through the mysterious trees extends ceaselessly in front of us, a pale gray streak hemmed in by high black walls ; in front, behind, and on all sides the impenetrable jungles cast their terrifying shadows on us.

When our eyes have grown accustomed to the night, we can see, as if in a dream, the vague forms of velvet-footed prowlers flitting amongst the thickets.

Towards eleven o'clock some little lights are seen, and the roadsides are strewn with the long stones of crumbling ruins, and above the trees the silhouette of giant dagabas stand darkly forth against the gloomy sky. I had been warned, so I knew that these were not hills, but only the temples of the buried city.

We found our night's lodging at an Indian inn, standing in an exquisite garden, whose flowers beamed in the light of our passing lamps.

Now the day dawns, and in the forest beneath me I can hear the birds awakening ; bushes and weeds like those of the jungles surround me as I stand on the temple's tower. Gray-winged bats, whose slumbers I have disturbed, flit in the morning air, and tiny leaping squirrels, full of vitality and grace, peer at me from out their leafy hiding-places.

At my feet some of the trees which form the winding street of the dead city are decked as for a spring pageant with red, rose, and yellow flowers. Suddenly a storm breaks over their heads, passes on, and disappears like a mist in the dim distance.

Now the sun quickly rises from the rain-clouds and

beats down upon my head ; it is time to seek some shady cover, so I descend the sacred tower by a ladder of branches to the green night where the men of this country dwell.

Amongst the monstrous roots which twist like serpents over the red earth, lie confused heaps of ruins and fallen stones. Hundreds of broken gods, stone elephants, altars, and chimeras are scattered about, giving proof of the fearful havoc wrought by the Malabar conquerors nearly two thousand years ago.

Pious Buddhists of our times have collected the most precious relics from the precincts of the indestructible dagabas, and have ranged the decapitated heads of the old gods in rows along the steps of prostrate temples. Some shapeless and broken altars still stand upright. These they decorate each morning with beautiful flowers and ever-burning lamps.

Anuradhapura in their eyes is still the sacred city where pilgrims from afar come to meditate and pray in the shadow of the great trees.

The dimensions and outlines of the great temples are still marked by sequences of columns, stones, and marbles starting from the towers and losing themselves in the woods. The most sacred spot was only reached after threading an interminable series of passages, which were guarded by inferior gods and monsters, a world of stone images now lying scattered and broken on the ground.

Besides these temples which rise above the swelling jungle, there are hundreds more which have fallen down, also the ruins of countless palaces. There are as many columns hidden in the forest as there are tree trunks, and all mingle in the eternal green twilight.

Towards the beginning of our era, the Princess Sanghamitta, who was a great believer, had a branch of the tree which sheltered Buddha, when the true faith was first revealed to him, brought here from the north of India ; that branch still lives and has become a great and complex tree, for after the manner of the banyan the branches have rooted too ; it is surrounded by

venerable altars, daily strewn with fresh sweet-smelling flowers, on whose stones the ever-lighted sacred lamps keep constant vigil amidst the dim green twilight.

A gloom of sadness is thrown over the forest by the beautifully sculptured marble porches, whose steps are guarded by smiling gods, which lead to no house. Time has left no further trace of these dwellings, which were of wood, but the steps and paving stones, and the gorgeous entrances which open on to weeds and roots and earth.

In one corner of Anuradhapura a village has existed for several years, a pastoral village which does not disturb the melancholy of the place, for it is concealed, like the ruins themselves, under overhanging branches.

The Indians who have returned to the buried city do not cut down the forest trees, but merely clear away the brambles and trailing growths, unbaring the fine sward where their goats and zebus can pasture at their pleasure, happy in wandering through the sacred groves.

Those who dwell among the sacred ruins, who bathe in the ponds of the old palaces, think that the spirits of the princes and the kings of old return. So they shun the shadows of the great dagabas on moonlit nights. All conspires to make the spot a shady refuge for prayer and meditation. A church-like calm hovers over the woody glens and the fine carpeting of grass, on which tall trees rain down showers of blossoms like large azaleas.

How touching it is to see little lamps placed before the statues broken two thousand years ago, and fresh flowers that deck these old stones!

It is not usual to offer bouquets to the Indian gods, but rather to strew the altars with flowers; jasmines in large quantities—nothing but the flowers snatched from their stalks—gardenias and waxy blooms of heavy odour that form a scented ground on which Bengal roses and red hibiscus flowers are placed; and there are many such scattered over the stones of these crumbling temples, whose mouldering remains daily sink deeper into the earth.

## THE ROCK TEMPLE



## CHAPTER II

### THE ROCK TEMPLE

At the edge of the forest which shelters the ruins, and close by the jungle, stands the Rock Temple in which the ancient images of the gods are still preserved intact.

Scattered about in various parts of the wild plain we perceive rocks similar to those of the temple.

Some ancient cataclysm must have hurled these smooth, round masses here. The swollen, brown shapes that look like enormous beasts crouched amongst the grasses, bear no resemblance to the surrounding soil.

Those which shelter the temple look like a collection of reposing monsters, and the largest ones support the upright dagaba (the Buddhist steeple), just as an elephant carries its tower; an old whitewashed tower rising from a sombre base. As I approach the solitary wastes of the jungle, sketched out silently in the hot evening sun, there is no one near the temple. The heaps of scented flowers lying on the ground, jasmines and gardenias, and the faded wreaths of former days tell one that the gods are not forgotten.

The monster-like rocks are bathed on one side by a lagoon in which crocodiles dwell under the lotus leaves. On drawing closer, faint lines can be seen etched on the sides of the polished stones, vague bas-reliefs so faintly traced as to resemble mere reflections, but drawn with such skill as to give a semblance of life; trunks, feet, ears, and the general outlines of elephants are here. The mysterious characteristics of the stones, which naturally resemble the skin of

the royal animals in texture and colour, have been utilized, too, with the strangest art.

Plants have grown here and there in the hollows of the rounded stones, plants whose sharp outlines and vivid colourings contrast in an unreal fashion with the surrounding tones of old, dull leather, for the hue of the periwinkles is too rosy and the hibiscus flowers are much too red, whilst the young areca trees, whose tufted plumes droop from their thin stalks, are too magnificently green.

Behind the group of rocks is concealed an old house which shelters the priestly guardians of the temple, one of whom now advances to meet me. He is young, and, like all Buddhist priests, clothed in a single, saffron-coloured garment which leaves one arm and shoulder exposed. He brings a highly ornamented key, over a foot in length, to open the sanctuary for me. As he advances, key in hand, his beautiful grave face and mystic eyes give him the look of some bronze-coloured St. Peter, clothed in raiment of coppery yellow that the sun has gilded.

We ascend a stairway cut in the rock out of whose rugged sides periwinkles grow; the dreary wastes of the jungles extending around us. The sanctuary is hollowed out of the heart of the principal stone, and we first enter a little cavern, a sort of atrium containing a table covered with white gardenias on which the offerings for the gods are placed. At the back is the entry to the sacred place, an entry guarded by bronze doors and a huge chased lock.

When the doors are thrown open with a grating crash, the huge painted idols confront us, and it seems as if some great cavern of precious perfumes had been unsealed, for freshly sprinkled essences of roses and sandal, masses of gardenias and tuberose make a thick white carpet on the ground, and embalm the air with intoxicating odours. Thus are the gods, who live in an almost perpetual gloom, ever bathed in the most exquisite scents.

There is hardly room for four or five persons in the

narrow temple, which is shut in like a dungeon and almost filled by the statues. Goddesses twelve feet in height, cut from the solid rock, decorate the walls with their closely serried forms; their faces have the same yellow tint as the priest's robe, and their head-dresses touch the ceiling. A Buddha of super-human size is seated in the middle, in the pose of one sunk in a perpetual dream, and smaller gods of the size of dolls are gathered round his knees, whilst the circle of staring goddesses seems to be gathered round in an air of anxious expectation. In spite of the brilliance of their golden ornaments and the freshness of the blue and red colouring of their stony robes, these long-eyed divinities give one the instant impression of fearful antiquity.

My unexpected visit has allowed a little daylight to filter into their grotto and permitted them to see, through the open vestibule, the confines of the jungle, where their crowds of worshippers lived in bygone ages. I look at them for a moment, almost embarrassed at finding myself so close in front of them, and I soon allow the priest to close the holy closet, so that the inmates of the rock may be plunged once more in silence and scented shades.

I take my leave, for I cannot understand these symbols, and this Buddhist peace is as yet hidden from me; the guardian in the yellow robe goes calmly back to his hermitage—priest of a strange temple, having no other care than the arrangement of his flowers, living a joyless life in this deserted place where sorrow never comes, living only in the hope that he may prolong his ego—after this present incarnation has ended—in an impersonal and sad eternity.

The sun is sinking as I leave the Rock Temple to return to the lofty forest under which Anuradhapura slumbers, and as I am leaving to-morrow at daybreak, I will wander amongst the ruins till night comes.

“The largest streets are those of The Moon, The King, The Sand-Covered Street and a fourth. In the



Street of The Moon there are eleven thousand houses. The distance from the principal door to the door of the South is sixteen miles ; and from the door of the North to the door of the South is sixteen miles also."

In reality, these fallen stones, these ruins and sculptures of the olden times, seem never-ending ; gods crowned with tiaras, heraldic monsters with the bodies of crocodiles, elephants' trunks, and birds' tails. Columns everywhere, some standing, others fallen and broken ; the thresholds of the fallen houses, guarded on each side by a smiling goddess, seem to invite us to enter, amidst thickets of roots and ferns—the houses of the inhabitants of the olden times, people who were hospitable no doubt, but whose dust has ceased to exist centuries ago.

The evening hour, with its harmonies of ruddy gold, finds me far from the house where I have my lodging. I am in the quarter of the King's Palaces, of which nothing remains but the monstrous foundation, the steps and the sculptured pavement. A death-like silence reigns, unbroken by the cry of insect or of bird. Here I rest at the edge of the gigantic tank, walled in with thick granite blocks, that was the bath of the royal elephants.

This lily-covered expanse of slumbering water makes a clearing amongst the high trees, and lightens the feeling of oppression caused by the overhanging branches ; nevertheless the air is still heavy and motionless. Bubbles of air continually make eddies on the surface of the treacherous water—bubbles breathed out by crocodiles who bask in the warm mud, in which silent worlds of tortoises and snakes reside.

There are no climbing plants here, and as no bushes mask the view, it is possible to see the boundaries of this kingdom of ruins which extends around us. Towards the west a fire seems to spring from the level of the ground and scatters its dazzling rays among the trees. It is the setting of the sun, which

in these latitudes is immediately succeeded by night-fall.

I must hasten further whilst there is light, and as this is my last evening, make my walk as long as possible.

The secret charm of the new land that I tread in the growing dimness lies in the delicate, dry, and sandy soil covered by short, fine grasses as were the woods my childhood knew, and the impression of my native land is heightened by the tracks traced by the shepherds and their flocks. There are trees, too, which have a sober little foliage, netted with gray veins like our evergreen oaks, and were it not for the great red lilies and bouvardias which now and then take me by surprise, it would indeed be like home, for the same pastoral calm and gentle melancholy reign here as there.

But these great stones and ruins are always here to disturb my dream, and statues with mysterious faces haunt the place. The dimness increases, and in the dusk the outlines of lonely Buddhas, sitting and smiling in vacancy, are almost terrifying.

I make my way back in the dusk by another road which has an even sweeter sadness, and a more marked resemblance to my native land. Though still conscious, in a latent manner, perhaps, of the Indian forest which surrounded me on all sides, I felt myself back among the oak woods of Saintonge or of Aunis, and walked forward confidently. Believing myself quite alone, a sudden tremor ran through me when I saw a huge, black man, whose head was bent sideways, and whose hands were on his hips, near by my side—a granite Buddha who had been there for two thousand years.

Drawing closer, one can see, even in the fading light, his lowered eyelids and his eternal smile.

A spiritual and holy calm seems to diffuse itself now that the moon is shining and the towers of the great temple train their black shadows over the jungle.

The moonbeams have a bluish tinge, and the light of Eden seems to illuminate the first and only night that I shall spend amongst these woods.

The splendour of the clearness of our warm July nights comes back to me, but here there is something different, something more lasting, something that tells of a perpetual and never-ending summer.

Between the trees the sky is visible, and the fine lawns, traversed by little paths, are illuminated with a strange radiance. Silence seems gradually to deepen as I penetrate the woods, in spite of the night music of the insects, which vibrates madly around me.

Alone I wend my way towards the shadows cast by the great dagabas of which the Indians are afraid ; whither my guide, thinking of the spectres of kings and priests, has not chosen to follow me.

On nearing one of the temples I instinctively choose the side lit by the moon, in order to reach the gigantic dagaba. No doubt this open space, which served as a peristyle, is haunted by spectres. Suddenly my footsteps resound on hollowed pavements and I am in the midst of broken altars and mutilated images bathed in a bluish glow. The vast stillness of Anuradhapura seems yet more strange, and I stop short like some frightened native ; indeed, I dare not walk round the dagaba, or cross that patch of noisome shadow.

Where are the kings and priests who built this monstrous temple ? Do they dwell in Nirvana or in nothingness, and how can their spirits ever return from such far-distant realms ?

Their Buddhist faith, too, seems a dead and perished thing, buried under these ruins and covered by the dust of the ancient idols.

THE HOME OF THE MAHARAJAH  
OF TRAVANCORE



### CHAPTER III

## THE HOME OF THE MAHARAJAH OF TRAVANCORE

*20th December*

It is the evening hour, and a period of calm and freshness follows the hasty sunset. It is but a few moments since I reached Palancota, an unknown village where I am to pass the night. Here, for the first time, I feel how far from home I am, amidst these trees and the silence that spreads over the declining day.

I made halt for a week in the damp, green island of Ceylon, to which the French steamer had brought me; then last night I crossed the ever-raging Gulf of Manar in a poor coasting vessel; since then I have travelled all day to this village, where I am met by an envoy of His Highness the Maharajah of Travancore, who quarters me in a little white house standing amidst shady trees.

To-morrow I set out on my journey in an Indian zebu cart for the land of Travancore, where my wanderings are to commence. This land is also styled "The Land of Charity," and is, I am told, a place of blissful peace, cut off from the mad turmoil of our age, an isolated country sheltered by spreading palms.

It is quite night now, an exquisite summer night; but there is no moon. A carriage takes me to see a Brahmin temple, one of the largest in the south, that has been illuminated for me. This temple is situated in a neighbouring town named Tinneveli.

We trot easily along a flat road, under the mys-

terious interlacings of overhanging trees ; trailing roots hang from the extended branches, myriads of trailing roots which look like tresses of long hair. Thousands of stars sparkle through the smallest gap among the branches, whilst under the leaves crowds of fireflies flit like sparks of flame. All these scintillations intermingle, so that in our rapid course we do not know which are stars and which are fireflies.

It is a joy to breathe the dry and healthful air after the everlasting dampness of Ceylon ; it seems a summer night of France, and crickets sing everywhere as they do in June with us. Strange wayfarers pass, along the roads, bronze figures draped in white muslin, whose naked feet pass noiselessly over the ground. Occasionally the sound of a distant tom-tom is heard, or a few groaning notes of the bagpipes tell us of India, and of Brahma, and how far we are from home. White houses with verandas commence to loom among the shady trees that line both sides of the road. They are the houses of Tinneveli, the town towards which we journey. At last, at the end of an avenue of palms, whose black heads are balanced on their frail stalks, a strange and striking outline is visible, the great temple. A stranger might recognize it, for its shape has been vaguely impressed on us by many pictures, but I did not expect to see it so large, nor that tower so high in the evening sky. It is a monstrous pylone, in all probability graven with images of intertwining forms of gods, whose roof, bristling with monsters, casts its dark profile on the starry firmament.

Our carriage soon passes under a granite archway framed by square columns of primitive style. Five ramparts once passed, we find ourselves in a square inclosure open to the shining stars. This I am not allowed to cross. The pylone, however, rises quite closely before us ; its extraordinary proportions seem to overhang and dwarf the doorway which I may not tread, although it stands widely open. With my eyes I seek to penetrate the dim obscurities of the

sacred temple whose infinite recesses are outlined by many twinkling and mysterious lamps.

I am allowed to look from here, but I must not approach or gaze too long. Under the columns of the peristyle that adjoins each side of the yawning entry, vendors of flowers, wreaths, and sacred cakes made for the gods are stationed, their stalls illuminated by little, flickering lamps. These dancing flames only light up the groups of men and the worn bases of the columns, which were once carved with monsters and with fantastic groups. The motionless nude forms of tawny merchants which rest against the ruddy granites might be taken for those of the gods themselves; their eyes glitter in the dim light, whilst their long hair falls in a black flood upon their shoulders. Above them gloom reigns supreme amongst the dim outlines of columns and vaulted arches.

The temple seems to my stealthy gaze to be of infinite extent. Endless rows of columns rise from an obscurity which the many-lighted lamps are powerless to dispel. The air is filled with sounds of prayer and chanted psalms, while white-robed forms flit dimly across the dark background.

The framework of the doorway through which I look, but through which I must not pass, is of a strange and unknown order of architecture. Notwithstanding that its proportions are those of a cathedral door, it has a low and furtive look, as if crushed by the weight of the monstrous pylone that overhangs it; and the colossal pyramid of gods towering to the stars makes it seem the entrance of a mysterious subterranean cavern.

This is my first visit to a Brahmin temple, but I immediately receive a hostile impression, a dismal feeling of dread and heathenish idolatry. I had not expected this, nor yet that I should have been refused admission. How childish were the hopes that I had cherished, I who had hoped to find some ray of light in the religion of our Indian ancestors!

Oh! for the sweet, deceptive peace of our Christian



churches which are open to all, and kind even to those who can believe no longer. . . .

They tell me that there are temples in other parts of India which are less sullen, and into which I may be allowed to enter, but it is hinted that I had better retire now, if I do not wish to be indiscreet. Should I desire it, our carriage may drive round the huge temple.

The inclosure is square and large enough to contain a town. In the middle of each of the four blank walls a huge pylone rises, under which a door has been hollowed out, but, except for this, these walls are as gloomy as those of a citadel.

Our carriage pursues its lonely road through the dim silence; even the place we are in is sacred and must not be trod by common men. We pass dark masses, which look like pedestals of idols supported on gigantic wheels and which seem to have been cast up here by chance. These are the chariots in which the gods are placed on feast days, when thousands of frenzied arms push them along the ground; but to-night they slumber with their wheels embedded in the ruts like dead things.

As we retrace our way under the avenues of palms whose dark heads are bent in all directions, a clamour of religious frenzy breaks over us, and the hollow sound of tom-toms fills the serene night air; horns bray like monsters, and barbarous noises fill us with a sense of terror.

# I

*21st December*

I am still in the village of Palancota. During the whole night bronzed serving-men have waved great fans in the air to drive mosquitoes and winged night-moths away. The doors and windows of the little native house have remained open during the night, so that the first gay beams of the dawning day find

ready access, and I awake amidst the splendour of the rising sun.

The veranda, still fresh with dew, offers an exquisite shelter, for it is snowy with whitewash, and the thick-set irregular pillars are covered with jasmynes.

A calm, pastoral country extends around me, bathed in a blissful morning charm; the gentle glow of one of our September mornings shines on a land that has been parched by autumn droughts. There are no great palms here, nor any of the rank vegetation of Ceylon, nothing but small trees with modest leaves, like those of our woods. Fields that have been reaped, orchards, pleasant, well-kept lanes wandering through the short grass, and further off, amidst the branches, little walls and carefully whitewashed houses. I look with astonishment on sights almost like those familiar to my childhood.

There are even sparrows, common sparrows just like those which nest among our roofs; but they are bolder, for, like all Indian living things, they have a confidence in man to which I am not accustomed.

Parts of this land closely resemble my own, and call back the charm of summer's declining days, though it is winter here.

A gentle sense of melancholy steals over me, and without, however, being wholly able to forget that I am in this far-off land of India, I dream that I am once more in my native land. These flat plains, whitewashed walls, and ripening harvests call to my mind the countrysides of Aunis and Saintonge, and the peaceful dwellings of the Isle of Oberon nestled amid the glories of their ripening vines.

There are, however, many things to dispel my dreams: a naked wayfarer brushes silently through the grass, turning his dusky countenance to me; a humming bird that has the changing hues of a precious stone settles among the sparrows; and a little girl of six, who has been sent with a message to me from the village, has strangely lengthened eyes, and

pins threaded with blood-coloured rubies are passed through her quivering nostrils.

Something strange and unhomely is seen in the distance among the trees, the angle of a pylone, the corner of a pyramid of gods and monsters springing from a temple of Vishnu hidden in the woods.

In spite of the shade afforded by the trees, the mid-day sun beats fiercely on the little whitewashed houses. A brightness, which eclipses that of our most gorgeous September day, hovers over the neighbouring orchards and the drooping grass. No one passes along the lanes, and everything is still. The great fans slumber too, for their attendants have gone to rest. All is silent and motionless, only the crows keep wakeful. They enter the room and wander round me. Their hopping noises and the silky swish of their wings are the only sounds that break the torpor that reigns everywhere.

The thought comes to me that our Christmas is close at hand, and this never-changing summer seems to fill me with an indescribable sadness.

The carriages which are to take us on our two days' journey to the wished-for land of Travancore make their appearance one after the other: two native chariots drawn by trotting bulls of the shape of long sarcophagi, into which one slides from the back, and in which it is impossible to sit upright. The one provided for me is drawn by a pair of white cattle, whose horns are painted blue; that of my servants has brown animals with copper-encircled horns. Meanwhile, till the sun is less powerful, the four peaceful, indolent, and gentle zebus lie on the grass and wait.

## II

We start at three, under the still fierce rays of the sun. My chariot is provided with mats and carpets, but is too low to allow me to sit upon them, so that I have to lie down, like a sick man in an ambulance, whilst my zebus at once fall into the hobbling trot

which must be the accompaniment of my slumbers for the next two days.

We change our teams of men and cattle frequently, for relays are placed along this road, which is the sole means of communication in the south between eastern India and Travancore. Up till now the happy "Land of Charity" has no railroad to draw away its riches; on the northern side the communication with the little State of Cochin is by means of boats, which thread a series of canals and lakes, but intercourse from other sources is barred by the natural defences of this fortunate land.

There are no ports on the western coast, nothing but inaccessible shores on which great breakers beat. The Great Central Chain of the Ghauts keeps watch on the east, with its rugged peaks and tiger-swarming forests.

My good cattle trot or gallop merrily along. Now that we have passed the village, the long, endless road extends before us, stretching its long, blood-coloured monotony between two rows of great trees that look like ash or walnut. The walnuts are young banyan trees, which in time will grow to be giants; hair-like roots have already commenced to grow here and there, and drooping from the branches to the ground, seek the earth so that they may form new stems. Vast lonely plains, thinly scattered with palms, appear between the trees.

Some holes are made in the sides of the cart to give air and light; and at the back there is that tiny round door through which I had to crawl with lowered head.

The chariot for the luggage and the servants follows closely in the wake, and the zebus with their good-natured long faces are my nearest neighbours; these gentle, ambling cattle, driven by a single rein threaded through their nostrils, almost touch my feet as I lie extended on my back, and their horns are bent backwards as if they feared to do any one an unwilling injury. The bronze-hued driver is quite

naked, and balances himself on the pole with a marvellous alertness, sitting cross-legged, with his hands placed upon his knees; he lashes his cattle with a thin reed or urges them on by making a noise like that of an angry monkey.

The desert wastes extend on either hand, becoming more awe-inspiring as we proceed further. Sometimes there are a few poor rice or cotton fields in the sad rays of the setting sun.

The outlines of the Ghauts are seen on the horizon, walling in the land of Travancore. We must cross them to-night by their only pass.

I am astonished to see these arid plains, on which grass even will not grow, after the luxuriant vegetation and the damp atmosphere of Ceylon. Some gray stalked palms which hardly seem to belong to the plant kingdom are dotted here and there, smooth and straight as tall masts. Swollen at the base, they taper towards the summit, which bears a little bunch of rigid fans posed on the stem whose length is out of all proportion to it. These stiff outlines are repeated endlessly on both sides of the road as far as the eye can reach.

There are no passengers on the well-kept road, with its bordered sides of banyan trees, and it might be thought to lead to nowhere. Gradually the exhausting heat and the rhythmic sequence of repeated jolts causes a vague drowsiness in which my thoughts commence to wander.

Towards five o'clock we pass four grotesque wayfarers, an important event to sleep-laden eyes that have become accustomed to the deserted road; four tall, scantily-clothed men, who march along with rapid footsteps. They wear large, red turbans, and their loins are swathed by red and white striped cloths.

Where can these gorgeously-apparelled men be going in such haste, and what may they seek in the midst of the desert?

Gradually I lose consciousness, and slumber rivets me to my stifling couch.

I awake an hour later ; twilight has come and I can but catch one last impression from the dying day.

The mountain chain has suddenly come closer, as if it had made a leap of some three miles, and now shuts out the eastern plains. Its deep, purple contours are outlined with incredible clearness against the rosy background that the setting sun has left ; the granite peaks are truly Indian in character, and take shapes that are unseen elsewhere, apeing the forms of pyramids, towers, and pagoda roofs. Thin, reedy palms, and fierce-looking aloes are the only plants that grow here ; their erect forms stand out sharply against the declining light, and the pale clearness of the sky is pierced by the outlines of their black leaves.

Suddenly darkness comes, and I feel a shade of melancholy, for the night will be moonless.

Till morning dawns I am jolted in my narrow sarcophagus, and I only receive a whirl of confused impressions. Furious cries, the jangling of bells as we pass other zebu wagons that unwillingly give place to us ; stoppages to change our cattle and our men in dimly seen roadside villages ; villages inhabited by sleeping Brahmins, who have placed little lighted lamps filled with coco-nut oil in the niches of the walls to frighten away the evil spirit of the night.

### *22nd December*

Next morning at daybreak I am aroused with many salutes, for we have reached the village of Nagercoil, where I am to repose till sunset. The mountain chain that I had seen before me yesterday outlined on the evening red, is now behind me, bathed in the rosy pallor of the dawning day ; we have crossed it during the night, and are now in Travancore. The little veranda-fronted house at which my zebus stop is the hotel, and the white-robed Indian who salutes with both his hands pressed on his forehead is the hotel-keeper who has had orders to await me and to reserve the whole house for me.

Like those of every Indian village, this " Travellers' Rest " consists of three or four whitewashed rooms on the ground floor, very clean, almost bare, with couches of rattan cane on which to sleep.

The roof, which is upheld by thick columns, overlaps the sides of the house, so as to give shelter from the rays of the burning sun.

I bathe and then breakfast under fans waved by listless serving-men. Then I am only conscious of the melancholy sadness of a darkened room, the suave silence and the visits of the crows, who come and hop about the floor of my room.

At two o'clock a dispatch comes from the Dewan (the minister of the Maharajah), stating that a carriage drawn by horses has been sent for me to a village called Neyzetavaray, in readiness to start at eleven o'clock at night.

So I decide to set out at once, instead of waiting as usual for sunset, in order that I may reach Neyzetavaray to-night, and spend the rest of the night in the carriage.

Our departure takes place under a dazzling white light and the repeated two-handed salutes of the inn-keeper; the bronzed waiting-men stand round my carriage in attitudes of silent appeal, nor does the nearly naked old woman, whose function is to fill the bath, allow her presence to be forgotten. I give some little coins of Travancore silver money to all these people, little thick coins like shining grains of silver, and then our zebus trot out briskly into the stifling heat.

The land gradually becomes more leafy, soon equaling the magnificence of Ceylon, and the jungle is full of flowering shrubs. The tall tufted palms that but yesterday looked so yellow and dried up, are now luxuriant bouquets of fans; coco-nuts with their great green feathers reappear in clumps, and from the banyans of the roadside, that form an archway over our heads, trailing roots descend in hairy masses to the ground. The country seems to be but a wilder-

ness of trees, an inextricable green entanglement. Just now we meet many people travelling along the shady road; folk in zebu carts like our own, and shepherds leading their flocks; processions of women too, countless groups of women carrying burdens on their heads in grass-woven baskets.

Here and there we pass little granite temples, roofed with flat stones, and temples of uncertain age that look like miniature replicas of those of ancient Egypt; or, maybe, under some huge banyan, which has become sacred in virtue of its great age, the tomb of a holy fakir, garlanded with fresh flowers, or a statue of the elephant-headed god Ganesa, that some pious hand has adorned with a necklace made of interwoven pinks and roses.

It is a somewhat unexpected surprise that though most of the men are handsome, the women we meet in such numbers are not beautiful; the bronze colour seems to harmonize better with the faces of the men, whose moustaches, too, hide the lips, which in the women are somewhat noticeably thick. With the exception of a few very young ones, who have the pure outlines of a Tanagra figure, nearly all have prematurely deformed busts, not even hid by drapery. They wear a golden ring in each nostril, and the ear lobes are so much lengthened by weighty rings, that they hang down to the shoulders of the old people. It is true that these are but the wives of pariahs, for those of the higher caste, that we have not yet seen, do not travel along the roads carrying burdens.

From time to time we pass tall, solid tables of granite, which have been thoughtfully provided so that these women may relieve themselves of their burdens, and replace them on their heads without the trouble of stooping down.

A charming tranquillity hovers over the land, and the scattered villages embowered in greenery are sunk in a calm like that of paradise.

Under a shady banyan tree, near which an old idol of Siva stands, I see a white-bearded man of Hebraic



cast of countenance, dressed in a violet-coloured robe, peacefully reclining with a book in his hands ; it is a bishop—a Syrian bishop ; surely a strange and unexpected encounter in this country of the mysterious rites of Brahma.

On reflection, however, there is nothing unusual in it. I knew that the Maharajah of Travancore had about five hundred thousand Christians among his subjects, Christians whose ancestors had churches here when Europe was still under pagan rule. These claim that they are the descendants of St. Thomas, who came to India about the middle of the first century. More probably they are Nestorians who arrived later from Syria, a land that still continues to send them priests. In any case, they come of an old and venerable stock, of that there can be no question. Jews, who emigrated after the second destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, are also found in the more northern parts of the kingdom. As in the case of the Christians, no one has ever disturbed them, for religious tolerance has always existed here, and in no instance has human blood been shed in this “ Land of Charity.”

Our zebus still maintain their constant trot. Towards evening the sun becomes overcast, and, as in Ceylon, a tropical dampness fills the air. Cocoa palms—those denizens of the lands of hot rains—become more predominant now that we have entered the infinite expanse of feathered palms which extends from the western shores to the coast of Malabar, plunging hundreds of miles in an everlasting green light. As we pass at the foot of the spurs of the Ghaut Chain our outlook is hemmed in by rocky peaks, overhanging forests, and masses of black cloud.

The journey had already lasted some four hours when the sense of weariness, aggravated by the cadenced jolting of our zebus, became so intolerable that I had to slip through the little opening at the front of my sarcophagus, and sit for a while on the pole in the pose of a crouching monkey by the side of my driver. The daylight has waned considerably,



HINDOO CHILD, WITH EAR-LOBES LENGTHENED BY WEIGHTY  
RINGS.



and under the black clouds and overhanging palms it is almost twilight. The green tunnel of banyans extends as ever in front of us, but here and there fantastic objects are seen looming from the woods through the evening shadows. They resemble huge, shapeless animals; sometimes they are scattered and sometimes in flocks, or even piled on one another. These strange objects consist of granite blocks—blocks which have the soft roundness of elephants and the bronze colour of their skin; there is no connection between them, and they look as if they had come here separately, or as if they had been rolled or thrown here, like corpses heaped up after a massacre. Now the larger roots and branches of the trees take the shape of elephants' trunks; indeed, it looks as if nature had had some vague idea of this particular animal shape in all her creation, as if the first thought of the elephantine form had existed here from the remotest antiquity, even from the date when the first unconscious thought had fashioned matter with stone. At present it looks as if elephants or the embryos of elephants were crowded round us, and the resemblances are even more striking now that it is quite dim in the woods which lie about us.

It is eight o'clock, and the heavy clouds which threatened us have cleared off without leaving a trace; the sky is pure, and the night starry. Crickets and grasshoppers chirp madly, and all the branches of the trees vibrate with insect joy.

A confused waving of torches is seen in front of us, and we behold a crowd advancing through the dusky foliage. We can hear the sound of drums and cymbals, and a chorus of human voices which accompanies the merry procession on their way through the avenues of palm and banyan.

In the flickering light of torches we see some twenty bare-chested young men, who carry an ornamented and flower-decorated palanquin on their shoulders, in which reposes one of their fellows, like a rajah or some god, in golden crown and long gilt robe.

It is a marriage procession, and this is the bridegroom who is being carried by his friends with such religious ceremony.

Towards eleven o'clock, as I was lying asleep at the bottom of the cart, one of the little loopholes was opened, and a letter, sealed with the arms of Travancore—two elephants and a seashell—was handed to me by the light from the lantern. We have reached the village of Neyzetavaray, and the letter is from the Dewan, bidding me welcome in the name of the sovereign, and telling me that the carriage awaits me.

It is a great pleasure to leave the Indian cart, to step into this elegant and well-hung carriage, and to set forth at a brisk trot with these two splendid horses. A coachman in the livery of the Maharajah—a long robe and a gilt turban that shines hazily through the gloom—is on the box, whilst two active footmen are stationed on the step. They almost seem to have wings as they run forward, uttering fearful cries in order to clear the way of the zebu carts which are now far more plentiful. It gives me an intoxicating sense of joy to move along so easily and so quickly through the calm starry night past the flying palms, after having endured so many jolts in my narrow box. We cleave the delicious night air, laden with the perfume of flowers, as if our road lay through some never-ending fairy garden.

Again we see the red light of torches and hear strains of music; it is another marriage procession wandering along in spite of the late and silent hour. This time the bridegroom is on horseback, and looks, with his golden robe hanging over his horse's crupper, like some king of the Magi.

Towards one o'clock in the morning, great dark palm feathers suddenly cease to interlace above our heads; there is a clearing in the forest and we reach a street. But this street, bathed in the clear, ashy gray light that falls in tropical regions from the stars on moonless nights, seems to be plunged in profound slumber. Houses, which must be white in the day-

light, now have a bluish tinge. All have a story rising above their verandas, from which little pointed festoons or lace-worked windows look through complicated columns. Lower down, on either side of the closed doors, little lamps shine like glow-worms; these tiny flames are placed in niches to keep watch against the intrusion of evil spirits. Many animals crouch motionlessly on the steps, as closely as possible to the human habitation, as if they, too, sought shelter from some unknown spell; zebus, sheep, and goats, who do not even wake as we pass by. There is no other sound than that of our light wheels upon the sanded road, and all these houses, slumbering cattle, and vague shapes of things unseen, are bathed in an uncertain bluish light, that looks like the reflection of some far-off Bengal fire.

In front of us there is a vast inclosure with a monumental door surmounted by miradores and columns opening on to an avenue which rows of lanterns show to be large and wide. Tops of palm trees and palace roofs rise above this wall, and quite at the back in the direction of the straight avenue the gigantic towers of Brahmin temples are seen. We are evidently going to enter the inclosure, for this must be the capital of Travancore, the true Trivandrum, the residence of the Maharajah, and the bluish street, peopled by slumbering animals, can only have been a suburb.

I was not aware that only Indians of high caste are permitted to inhabit this privileged inclosure till my carriage turned sharply to the right from the face of the great door which I thought we should enter. Plunging once more into long shady roads resembling park avenues, we stopped at length before a splendid dwelling standing in a garden, which, alas! was built in European style.

An apartment has been prepared here for me, and the gracious hospitality of the Maharajah awaits me in a European dwelling that seems like a kindly anomaly in the midst of old and marvellous Hindustan.

## III

*23rd December*

Towards the close of the first night I spent in Trivandrum a terrible noise was heard on my roof ; rushes were succeeded by sounds of battle, and in my half-waking starts I thought I could recognize (not without some dread, seeing that my rooms were open), the springs and yells of some members of the tiger tribe ; but the calm of the night and the wood-work of the roof must have exaggerated the noise, for these were only the tiger-cats of the neighbourhood, which sleep by day in the garden trees and disport themselves during the night, boldly invading the dwellings of men.

The early morning at Trivandrum is a period of unspeakable sadness. A murmur of human voices is heard before the wild and sad dawn breaks through the pallor of the sky, sounds that seemed to come from a distance, from the inclosure sacred to Brahma ; a cry that is like that of humanity itself waking to new tortures, and ever oppressed by thoughts of death. The birds then make their homage to the returning sun, but their morning serenade has not the charming gaiety of those that sing in our meadows in the springtime. Here the twitterings of the smaller birds are drowned by the mocking voices of parakeets, and the funereal croakings of the crows. First, one or two isolated croaks are given as a signal, then a hundred and a thousand join in fearful concert to celebrate the glories of death and putrefaction. Crows are everywhere ; the whole of India is infested with them, and even here, in Travancore, the land of peace and enchantment, their cries are heard directly the day breaks ; their voices fill the vaulted arches of the palms, and serve to dim the joy of all that lives and wakes under the glorious foliage. They say " Here we watch, we who wait for the death of all that lives. Our prey is certain and everything will belong to us."

After a while the cawing ceases, and the birds disperse. Once more the far-off rumour of men's voices is heard, so deep and powerful that one feels that there are thousands of these Brahmins assembled in the great sanctuary calling on their God. A confused noise of tambourines, cymbals, and sacred shells comes from all points of the forest of palms in which Trivandrum is situated, telling of the morning adoration in little temples scattered amongst the woods.

At last the sun appears, and the dwelling-houses, which are either entirely open, or but shut off from the darkness by light blinds, are at once flooded with its rays. Now all the melancholy of daybreak vanishes in this exquisite hour of splendid brightness. I descend to the garden, a sort of clearing in the midst of the palm forest, where there are lawns and trees covered with rose-coloured flowers; ferns and plants loving a moist heat grow in great luxuriance, and those wonderful-foliaged Indian plant, that are tinged like flowers with dull red, violets pale carmine, or striped with white, like the veinings of a reptile's back, or spotted with eyes like those of a butterfly's wings.

Contrary to the custom which obtains with us, seven o'clock in the morning, the time when a trace of freshness still lingers among the green avenues, is the ceremonial visiting hour of Trivandrum; and I am informed that to-morrow morning at that hour I shall be conducted through the sacred precincts and presented to the Prince. As midday approaches all signs of life cease; for in spite of the shade afforded by the palms, the vertical rays of the sun plunge everything into somnolence and torpor; even the crows are silently seated on the ground under the shelter of the shady trees.

The road that I can see from my veranda, disappearing into the green twilight, becomes deserted. There are still a few passers-by, men and women dressed in scarlet loin-cloths, whose deeply bronzed



chests shine with coppery-coloured reflections ; these reddish figures move noiselessly on naked feet along the blood-coloured road, whose tone is heightened by the vividly contrasting green of the surrounding palms. Sometimes the earth trembles under the heavy and almost noiseless footsteps of the Maharajah's elephants as they return from some work in the fields to the stables of the palace where they sleep. After that nothing more is heard, and, emboldened by the silence, little leaping squirrels possessed with mad activity enter my room.

Towards evening human activity begins again, and I leave my retreat in one of the Maharajah's carriages, the fleet horses of which give me an illusion of freshness.

I am quartered in the nearer parts of Trivandrum, where the trees are no longer masters, and lawns interspersed with beautifully sanded avenues have been laid out. Scattered among the gardens are all the buildings necessary to the life of a modern capital—ministries, hospitals, banks, and schools. All these things would have been less out of place had they been built in the Indian style, but in these modern days we have to be content to find the same errors of taste in all the countries of the world. Churches and chapels are found here too, Protestant, Catholic, and Syrian ; the latter are the oldest and have façades of childish simplicity. I, however, did not come to Travancore to see these things, and I begin to perceive how difficult it will be to come into real touch with the India of the Brahmins, that deeper India which I feel surrounding me ever here, ever living and unchangeable, ever haunting me with mystery.

Outside the new quarters the palms extend their sovereignty over the immense Trivandrum of the low-caste Indians. All the movement and the bustle of the somewhat silent town is concentrated in the "Street of the Merchants." At this hour it is filled with people, and my horses must move slowly through

the crowds. I might call them a race of gods, so beautiful are their faces, and their attitudes so noble. The expression on their countenances is profound and unfathomable.

The perfection and grace of an antique bas-relief are realized by these crowds whose arms and chests seem hewn from bronze.

These superb and refined Brahmins look on costumes and ornaments with disdain, and are less clothed than the natives of middle caste or even than pariahs. A cloth of grayish white is girded round the loins, and across the naked chest nothing but a little linen cord worn round their shoulders, the outward sign of rank, that the priest has knotted around them when they were born and which is never removed ; a sacred cord with which one lives and dies. On their foreheads, between the dark grave eyes, the monogram of their god is inscribed ; but this must be piously repainted each day after the morning ablution : a red disc with three white lines for the followers of Siva, and for those of Vishnu a sort of red and white trident, which starts between their eyebrows, and whose points reach the hair, adding a strangely puzzling look to their expression.

There are few or no women, though at the first glance the long tresses of polished ebony hair, sometimes knotted and sometimes hanging over their shoulders, would give the impression that these were of the other sex. Those who show themselves are of the lower castes, and have common features like the carrier-women we met upon the road. The wives and daughters of the Brahmins, who walk by thousands in the evening air, are doubtless in the reserved inclosure.

All the houses which I saw last night, closed and sleeping in the bluish light, now form an animated bazaar, where fruits, grain, and lightly printed stuffs of antique design are sold ; there are also wares of yellow copper, bright as those of gold, many-branched slender lamps mounted on tall feet like those of

Pompeii, plates and vases for religious usage, and gods and goddesses mounted on elephants.

My guide takes me to visit the factories founded by the ruling sovereign, where pottery is made after the beautiful ancient fashion ; there are others where carpets are woven of long wools whose colours are copied from those of Rajputana or Cashmere, and finally the workshops where patient workers chisel ivory obtained from the elephants of the neighbouring forests, making little Brahmin gods or the handles of fly-fans and parasols.

But this was not what I had come to India to see, and the only thing that interested me was the real Indian life of the closed palaces and the forbidden Temple.

Trivandrum has a zoological garden too, with parks of gazelles and ponds of crocodiles, as well kept up as those of Europe ; one of the few places where it is possible to escape from the stifling shade of the palms, and to overlook the distant prospect of forests and jungles. Lawns have been laid out with rows of exotic flowers and other matchless plants ; and one can wander in confidence through this artificial forest where all the branches are carefully trimmed, and where the tigers and serpents which inhabit the neighbouring jungles are kept in cages.

A band of natives executes European airs with great precision in a kiosk situated in the garden during that short and fleeting hour between the cool evening and the sudden fall of darkness. Among the rare listeners stationed in the sanded avenues are a few slim, nude forms, and one or two white babies (the only ones living in Trivandrum) looking very pale in their Indian nurses' arms, and some children of native princes who, alas ! no longer wear the national costume, but are disfigured into the odd forms of Western dolls, dolls still beautiful in spite of their coppery tinge and great black velvety eyes. As this garden is situated on an eminence, it is possible to see the Indian Ocean in the distance ; an ocean that

has no ships, and which, unlike that of other countries, has no communication with the outer world ; here it is but a useless and hostile element sequestering one from other lands, since there are no ports along the coast, not even barques or fishermen—nothing but a girdle of insuperable breakers. The apparition of the far-off sea adds a feeling of melancholy to the sad thoughts of exile that steal over me during this fashionable evening hour, when the band plays for the few lonely babies of Trivandrum.

Now the sun sets quickly in a moment of glorious splendour, the red earth seems lit up with a rose-coloured Bengal fire, and the inextricable tangle of branches that extends as far as the eye can reach assumes a more vivid tone, as if illuminated by green Bengal flames. Now the night falls without any intervening twilight, prematurely and almost suddenly, though its time is invariable and, unlike our own, uninfluenced by the season. There is still light in the garden, but under the trees and in the leafy lanes it is quite dark. Now an outcry rises from the great Temple of Brahma, and from the other temples, scattered round, the sound of the cymbals and sacred shells is heard once more. Thousands of little lamps filled with coconut oil twinkle amongst the woods, tracing the dim roads in lines of tiny red flames.

#### IV

*24th December*

It is seven o'clock in the morning ; the hour of official visits and princely receptions. As I take my carriage and set out for the Maharajah's palace where I am to be presented to my host, the bright, warm rays of the eternally summer-like sun of Travancore strike slantingly under the palms, and bespatter the stem of the arecas and coco-nuts with tones of rosy gold. We trot through the avenues of green palms and soon reach the huge door which I had expected

to pass through on the night of my arrival; this door gives access to a square space which incloses a town within the town, and into which people of low caste are never allowed to enter.

This time my carriage crosses the threshold guarded by a picket of armed cavalry. The sacred character of the place is at once apparent, for we pass an immense tank in which a thousand Brahmins, plunged to their waists in water, are making ablutions and praying according to rites that are as old as the world. With their dripping hair, and wetted breasts that shine in the sun like new bronze, they look like water gods, but so absorbed are they in their dreams that not a single one turns to look at the carriage brushing past them, in whose honour the military guard plays fife and tambour.

The walled-off space contains residences of princes, schools, and the huge temple whose four colossal towers dominate all else, four obelisks of sculptured gods pointing to the sky. The fronts and external walls of the palaces are somewhat sad and commonplace; above the doors, however, the usual monsters rear their fierce heads and tell of India, just as in the extreme East dragons are characteristic of China.

A glowing red pervades the whole, for the dust, red as the roads themselves, has for centuries covered all these buildings with tones of blood and of burnt sienna.

Another squad of cavalry is drawn up before the Maharajah's door, superbly accoutred men in red turbans, who handle their repeating rifles with truly modern precision.

The Maharajah himself appears on the threshold. I had feared to see the Prince dressed in a European frock coat, but no, he has had the good taste to prefer the Indian dress, a turban of white silk and a velvet robe with large diamond buttons.

The first reception-room is paved with earthenware, and crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling. In the middle stands a throne of chiselled silver, whilst

the other furniture is carved from massive black ebony in that Indian style of lace-like decoration in which the Asiatic workman excels all others.

I have been commanded to convey a French decoration to His Highness, and when my simple mission has been fulfilled, we speak of that Europe which the Prince will never see, for the unswerving rules of his caste do not allow him to leave India. We speak, too, of literary matters, for the Prince has a cultivated and refined taste. Then he takes me into a high gallery to show me the marvellous ivories and other treasures which he is pleased to collect, and soon it is time for me to withdraw.

As I return through the green shade of the palms, I regret that I have been unable to converse on more serious subjects with this amiable prince, whose soul must be so different from our own. We shall meet again during my stay here, but my first interview has taught me that the mysteries of his inmost thoughts will be as impenetrable to me as the great temple. There is a radical difference of race, ancestry, and religion between us; then we do not speak the same language, and the necessity of conversing through a third person forms (in spite of the affability of my interpreter) a barrier which isolates us from all communion.

I am to be presented to the Maharanee (the Queen), who lives in a separate palace, in two or three days, though she is not the Maharajah's wife, but his maternal aunt. The principal families of Travancore belong to an ancient race that has almost disappeared from the rest of India, in which the transmission of name, title, and fortune is solely through the female side, who in addition have the right to repudiate their husbands at will.

In the royal family the Maharanee is the eldest of the daughters, and the Maharajah the oldest son of the first princess of royal blood. As neither the actual Queen nor her sisters have any female descendants, the dynasty is shortly bound to expire.

The children of the Maharajah have no right to reign, and they do not even bear the title of Prince.

The women of this caste, whose family name is Nayer, nearly all have features of an especial delicacy. They wear plain bands of hair on each side of their foreheads, but the rest of the hair, which is very black and smooth, is piled into a mass on the top of their heads. This falls forward on to one side like a soldier's cap, giving a somewhat rakish expression, which contrasts strongly with their grave and formal manner.

## v

*25th December*

Towards five o'clock in the evening, as the burning sun has commenced to sink, quantities of musicians in zebu chariots arrive, almost stealthily. The Maharajah has lent me the orchestra from his palace for several hours.

They come barefooted and noiselessly, entering my room with the velvety step of a cat; then these artists, who have fine and delicate profiles, make ceremonious bows and seat themselves on the ground. They wear little gilt turbans on their heads and diamonds in their ears, and are draped in the antique fashion with a piece of silk barred with gold, which is thrown over one shoulder so as to leave part of the chest and a metal-encircled arm free. Aromatic odours and scents of rose waters escape from their light clothing.

They carry huge instruments with copper strings, like gigantic guitars or mandolines, whose curved handles end in monsters' heads. These guitars, which give out different tones, vary much amongst themselves, but they all have large bodies, whilst here and there along the neck hollow balloons, looking like fruits clustered round a stalk, are placed to increase their resonance; they are very old and

precious, so withered, that they have acquired great sonority ; they are painted or gilt, or inlaid with ivory, and even their quaint appearance fills me with a sense of mystery, the mystery of India. The musicians smilingly show them to me ; some are made to be stroked by the fingers ; others to be played with a bow ; others again are struck with a stick of pearl ; and there is even one that is played by rolling a little ebony thing looking like a black egg over the strings. What refinements unknown to our Western musicians ! There are tom-toms tuned to different pitches, and boy singers whose robes are of especial richness. A printed programme prepared for this sole purpose is placed before me, in which the strange but melodious names of the musicians are all in twelve syllables.

It is five o'clock, and all, to the number of about twenty-five, are seated in readiness on the carpet ; the room is already filled with shadow, and punkhas keep the air in motion with their slow and wearied movement. All the monster-headed guitars are in readiness, and the musicians are about to commence. What agonizing sounds most instruments of such a size produce, and what a clamour such tom-toms. I am all attention, prepared for much noise. Behind the musicians an arched door, leading to a white vestibule, remains open, and a golden ray from the setting sun falls on a group of red-turbaned soldiers of the Maharajah's army standing in the reddish glow, but the musicians themselves are plunged in vague shadow.

Can the concert have commenced ? From their grave and attentive attitudes, and the way in which they watch one another, it would appear so. But there is nothing to be heard. But yes ; a hardly audible high note, like that of the prelude to "Lohengrin," which is then doubled, complicated, and transformed into a murmured rhythm, without growing any louder. . . . What a total surprise, this almost toneless music coming from such powerful instru-



ments ! One might have said the buzzing of a fly held within the hollow of one's hand, or the brushing of the wings of a night-moth against the glass, or the death agony of a dragon-fly. Then a musician places a little steel thing in his mouth and rubs his cheek over it, so as to produce the murmurings of a fountain. One of the largest and most complicated guitars, that the player caresses with his hand as if he feared it, says "hou, hou" all the time on nearly the same notes, like the veiled cry of the screech owl ; another instrument, which is muted, makes a sound like that of the sea breaking on the shore ; and there are hardly audible drummings played by fingers on the edge of the tom-toms. Then suddenly come unexpected violences, furies that last for a couple of seconds, when the strings vibrate with full force, and the tom-toms struck in another way give out dull and heavy sounds like elephants walking over hollow ground, or mimic the rumblings of subterranean water, or a torrent that falls into an abyss. But this subsides quickly, and the nearly silent music continues.

A young Brahmin with beautiful eyes is seated cross-legged on the ground holding an instrument whose rude shape contrasts with the delicate refinement of the others ; it is made of common pottery, and has pebbles inside a sort of jar with a large opening in one of its smooth and swollen sides.

The sound which he draws from it varies according as he leaves the jar open, or stops the opening by pressing its mouth close to his body. He plays on it with marvellously nimble fingers and sometimes the sound is light, at others deep, occasionally hard and dry like a crackling of hail ; then the pebbles are heard moving at the bottom.

When the voice of one of the guitars rises above the whispered silence, it is always in a melody of training sounds, a passionate and full-voiced song that plunges into agony ; and the tom-toms, without drowning the trembling and plaintive notes, beat an accompaniment of mysterious import which expresses the

exaltation of human suffering far more poignantly than our most supreme music.

"The elephants are here." Some one utters this phrase, thus breaking the charm that holds me a listener. What elephants? Oh, yes! I had forgotten—I had expressed a desire this morning to see the elephants caparisoned with palanquins on their backs in the Indian manner, and the order for their equipment had been graciously given to the Palace stables.

The music ceases, for I must go outside to see the elephants. When I reach the threshold I find myself in the presence of three enormous beasts, awaiting me and standing by the door, sharply defined in the brightness of the setting sun. Their heads face me, and at first I can only distinguish amongst their trappings the threatening ivory tusks, and the huge trunks of rose colour veined with black, and the striped ears which keep up a continual and fan-like motion. Long green and red robes, colonnaded palanquins, necklaces of bells and head ornaments of gold embroidery that fall over their huge foreheads. Three superb animals in their prime of seventy years so gentle and tractable; they turn their intelligent little eyes towards me as they kneel down in order to allow me to mount if I should wish.

A gracious twilight fills the room as I return to the music of beating wings and rustling insects.

Each of the guitars chants its despair in turn by intervals of almost voiceless harmony, the one that is struck by the hand or bow, the one that is beaten with the pearl rod, and that strangest one of all which weeps when the little egg-shaped ebony ball is rolled over its strings.

Their songs have not the bewildering echoes of some far-removed sadness, as those of Mongolia or China have, for they are almost comprehensible to our senses; they betray the sad brooding of a race that is not different from our own, though long centuries have parted us; they and our gipsies use

the same fevered phrases, though in a somewhat coarser way.

Human voices were only introduced towards the end. One after the other great-eyed, slender youths, clothed in gorgeous draperies, executed trills with wonderful rapidity, but their childish voices are already broken and worn; the man in a golden turban, who conducts, first plays a weird prelude and then with lowered head looks into their eyes in the manner of a serpent fascinating a bird. I feel that he cast a spell on them, and that he could, if he wished, break the whole mechanism of their feeble throats. It seems the words which they chant to these sad rhythms are prayers to an offended goddess whom they wish to appease.

Finally, it is the turn of the great master, a man of about twenty-five to thirty, who has a beautiful face and an expression of energy. He is going to represent, with action and song, the complaints of a young girl whose lover loves her no longer.

Seated on the ground he seems plunged in meditation whilst his face becomes sombre. Then, all at once, the voice bursts forth with the cutting tone of Eastern bagpipes, though the upper notes are possessed by a hoarse, manly quality, and an infinity of sorrow is expressed in a poignant and, to me, novel manner. The sorrow expressed in his face and the contractions of the delicate hands, is rendered with highest art.

This orchestra and these singers belong to the Maharajah, and their music resounds daily in the silence of his guarded palace, where ever-bowing servants, whose hands are joined in a perpetual salute, walk with cat-like steps. How far away the thoughts of this prince must be from ours, and how different his conceptions of the sadnesses of life and love and death! But this strange and rare music, which is part of his being, reveals a portion of his soul to me that I should never see in our short and formal interviews, so burdened with ceremony and foreign words.

## VI

*26th December*

Three thousand Brahmins, who live in the sacred inclosure, and bathe in the holy pond, are at present the guests of the Maharajah. They have come from the surrounding countries, and from those forests where they live on fruit and grain, absorbed in mystic dreams and disdainful of the things of this world. They have assembled to celebrate a religious festivity that lasts for fifty days, and is held every six years. They offer long prayers of expiation for blood that was shed many years ago in a neighbouring country during a war of conquest ; it matters little that it was countless years ago ; the spilt blood still calls for supplicating cries, still demands religious music, and the bellowings of sacred shells like those graven on the arms of Trivandrum. The ray-crowned idols of Pandavas, which are thirty feet high, and have hideous faces, and fierce downcast eyes, have been drawn for this occasion from their secret sanctuaries. Muscular efforts aided by ropes have rolled them into the open air and sunlight of the temple courtyard, where they may strike terror into the minds of the simple—whilst the initiated pray to the invisible and ineffable Brahma from the depths of their souls. During these celebrations, the entire Brahmin inclosure palpitates with the intense life of ancient rites, of burning prayers of terror, and of ecstasy. I can hear the far-off murmurings which have an irresistible attraction for me, but I am rigidly excluded, and neither the influence of the Maharajah nor that of any one else can help me.

The festival of the initiated has found an echo among the believers of the middle and lower castes who live under the immense palms that cover the rest of the town, and who, like myself, are excluded from communion with the Brahmins. Prayers and supplications are heard there too, in the whitening dawn, and at the time of sunset.

Imploring cries are heard in all the cemeteries and at the foot of the sacred trees under which warriors have been buried. The little sacred lamps have been lit all along the shady roads and at those places where monumental stones arise ; and music offerings and flowers are here too. The smallest temples and even the simple altars consecrated to the divinities of the jungles shine with a thousand trembling flames. Here I am welcome to wander as I choose, under the gloom of the interlacing palms, in search of the music and the lights that lure me to them.

I reach a very old and humble temple, with broken granite columns, standing at the foot of huge trees which lose themselves in the gloom. Tiny lamps filled with coco-nut oil, which look like glow-worms, cast their light about the temple, which is garlanded with flowers and ornaments of pleated reeds. The horrible parrot-faced god is stationed in the furthest of two or three little rooms, where he crouches, many-armed, with his green face overshadowed by a high headdress. Here young, white kids disport themselves in these sacred precincts, of which they are the familiar and venerated occupants. Half-nude worshippers, decked in necklets of flowers, throng round the door, but the noise of the tambourines and bagpipes is almost drowned by the constant and plaintive bellowings of the sacred shells.

Smiles of welcome greet me, and after having placed wreaths of jasmine flowers, which have intoxicating odours like that of incense, round my neck, the people stand on one side that I may see.

Now I reach a place where a monstrous fig tree of great age stands. Men are assembled round a granite platform, supported on pillars which must have belonged to some ancient funeral monument, revelling in the sound of maddening music. The customary lights, the garlands of roses or jasmine, and the offerings of fruit and grain are here too. A kind of officiating priest, a man of low caste, whose face is quite black, recites ritual phrases in a frenzied manner,

broken by the din of the tom-toms. Women stand behind the tree, almost hidden in shadow, and utter constant and long-protracted cries. Children tend a fire of grass which has been lighted on the ground, and into whose flames the tom-toms are constantly thrust so that they may retain their dry, sonorous tones. The officiating priest is seized with increasing excitement, and soon seems possessed of an evil spirit. He gives vent to terrible howls and seeks to dash his head against stones or trunks of trees. A hedge of naked arms is formed round to keep him from harm, till at length he falls on the ground exhausted and motionless with a horrible rattling in his throat.

Yet it would seem that this incomprehensible god, whom they worship under the palms to the sound of the tambours and the savage music, is the same deity in different shape that the mysterious Brahmins worship in spirit in the secret recesses of the great temple.

Indeed, this god is but another form of the God we adore. For there are no false gods, and the wisdom of sages who profess that theirs is the true God, and that they alone know his name, is but childish folly. For the rest, the conception of a God seated amidst the unmeasurable and inaccessible, be he one or many, be he named Brahma, Jehovah, or Allah, so far exceeds our comprehension, that a little less or greater error can hardly matter in our ideas of Him. No doubt, too, that He listens just as attentively to the prayer of the simple, uneducated native, who wanders through the forest pouring forth his agony of life and death at the foot of some green-faced fetish.

## VII

*26th December*

The cry of the crows is so much intermingled with all the other sounds of India, that one ends by ceasing to heed it. I have already almost ceased to notice the hideous morning *aubade* that immediately succeeds

the murmurings that rise from the temple. A great tree that stands before my terrace is one of their favourite nightly resting-places ; a tree covered with large branches which bend under the weight of their black burden.

As I take my seat in the carriage this morning, the first rays of the sun, which rises at a fixed hour each day, just commence to penetrate through the leaves and under the vaulted palms ; once more I cross the forbidden inclosure in order that I may present myself before the Maharanee (the Queen).

Directly we have passed the entrance, I see the sacred ponds again in which Brahmins plunged to their waists in water are making their customary morning ablutions.

This walled town, which I am visiting at a much earlier hour than on the last occasion, contains not only the dwellings of the princes standing amidst gardens of palms, but streets bordered by humble houses built of clay that are inhabited by Hindoos of high caste. This charming hour of daybreak is the one chosen by the long-eyed housewives for the decoration of the earth that lies in front of their dwellings. They trace wonderful patterns in white powder upon the red soil, which has previously been well swept and beaten. Their designs are but fleeting, and are carried away by the lightest wind or by the feet of men, goats, dogs, and crows. They do their work very quickly, guiding themselves in the tracing of these designs by marks which have been placed there beforehand, and are visible to them alone. Bending forward in a graceful attitude, they move the little box which contains a powder that escapes in a white trail like an endless ribbon over the surface of the ground. Complicated arabesques and geometrical figures grow marvellously under their hands. Often, too, they place a hibiscus flower, an Indian pink, and a yellow marigold at the chief junction of their network of lines after the design is completed. The little street, decorated from one end to the other in

this manner, seems to be momentarily covered by a fairy carpet.

The whole of this quarter has retained its character of old-world elegance, honest peace, and simple dignity.

In front of the door of the Maharanee's garden red-turbaned soldiers are drawn up, who salute and present arms to the sound of fife and drum, in faultless manner. The Queen's husband descends from the steps in front of the house to welcome me, with truly distinguished courtesy. Like the Maharajah, he has had the good taste to retain his Indian dress of velvet with diamond buttons, and his turban of white silk. Notwithstanding this, he is a scholar and a man of refined literary taste. The Queen holds her receptions in a room on the first floor which is, I am sorry to say, decorated with European furniture, but she herself, in national costume, looks like a charming personification of India. She has a regular profile, pure features, and magnificent large eyes, in fact, all the beauty of her race. In accordance with the tradition of the Nayer family, her jet-black hair is wound round her forehead. Enormous rings of diamonds and rubies hang from her ear-lobes, and her naked arms, which are much bejewelled, are unconcealed by her velvet bodice. For the rest, a piece of silk figured with exquisite designs in gold covers her statuesque form. Oh ! it is easy to imagine the degree of refinement to which a noble lady of sovereign race may attain in a country where even the lower classes are cultured, but the especial charm of this Maharanee lies in her benevolence and in a reserved and gentle sweetness.

There is a charm of sadness, too, which is apparent behind her smiles. I know one of the griefs which has darkened the almost cloistered life of the Queen. Brahma has given her no daughter, nor any niece that she might adopt, so her dynasty is doomed to expire, and doubtless there will be great changes in Travancore, a land hitherto sheltered from the march of centuries.



We speak of Europe, which has a charm for her imagination, and I see that one of her dreams has been to know this strange and far-off country, as inaccessible to her as the planet Mars or the moon, for no Indian lady of noble birth, not to mention a queen, may undertake such a voyage without incurring so great a loss of caste that she would at once fall to the rank of a pariah.

During the few remaining days which I shall spend here I may sometimes have the honour to see the Maharajah, but never again the gracious Maharanee, so before leaving I seek to impress her image on my mind, for her face does not seem to belong to our times, and it is only in old Indian miniatures that I have had a glimpse of such princesses.

After my visit to the Maharanee has terminated, I go, without leaving the Brahmin inclosure, and see the sons of one of her sisters, who are heirs presumptive to the throne, after whose death the dynasty will terminate.

They bear the title of first and second prince, and live in separate dwellings standing in the midst of gardens. Though these young men wear plumes of diamonds in their turbans, hunt the tiger and follow the rites of Brahma, they are none the less conversant with the trend of modern thought, and occupy themselves with literature or natural philosophy. One of them, who had in accordance with my request taken me to see the trappings of his elephants, showed me some remarkable photographs which he had taken and developed himself, and which he had afterwards sent to an exhibition in Europe, having the wish to gain a medal.

I felt a desire this evening, as the sun was setting, to see the Indian Ocean, whose waves break on the barren shores about a mile from Trivandrum.

I had to cross the whole extent of the walled town, but the livery of the Maharajah's carriage insured me safe conduct. I passed peaceful little streets bordered by Brahmin houses, the red walls of palaces and

gardens, and skirted the precincts of the great temple to which I had never been so close.

The town once crossed, I found myself in a sandy waste amongst the dunes, where the last red rays of the setting sun still lingered. A few broken and twisted palms were scattered here and there, all leaning in the same direction, having yielded like the trees of our own coasts to the force of the sea winds. Heaps of sand which must have taken centuries to accumulate, crumbled remains of madrepore shells and stones, the pulverization of myriads of existences, announced the near presence of the great destroyer, whose terrible voice commenced to make itself heard. Suddenly the road made a turn among the dunes, and the ever restless ocean was spread out before me.

In other regions of the world it seems as if human life flocked instinctively towards the sea. Men construct their dwellings by its shores, and their towns as nearly as possible to its waters; they are jealous of the smallest bay that can contain ships, and even the smallest strip of coast.

Here, on the contrary, it is shunned as something dead or void. This sea is but an abyss that cannot be crossed, that serves no purpose, and but inspires terror. It is almost inaccessible, and no one ventures on it. Before the endless line of breakers, and along the endless extent of sand, the only human trace that I can see is an old granite temple, lowly and rude, with worn columns, half eaten away by salt and spray. It is placed here to appease and exorcise the restless devourer which imprisons Travancore, and which, calm as it is this evening, will shortly, when the summer monsoon commences, rage furiously during an entire season.

#### VIII

*Friday, 29th December*

Among the many graceful favours which the Dewan, in accordance with the instructions of his

Serene Highness the Maharajah, showered on me, one of the most charming and unforgettable was my reception of to-day at the college for young ladies of noble race.

I set out on my way directly the sun had risen, not, indeed, without some misgivings, for I dreaded some tedious display of learning. In the forest palms, however, where we allowed our horses to walk, fearing that we might arrive too early, I saw first one, then two, three pretty little girls, sparkling with magnificent ornaments; naked-footed children of about twelve years with white flowers in their hair, whose gold-embroidered silks and the jewels which covered their arms and neck shone in the first rays of the early morning sun. Their steps, like mine, were directed towards the Brahmin inclosure, but when they saw my carriage they commenced to hasten, running as fast as the bands of precious silks encasing their legs would allow them. Was it possible that these toilettes of Peris or Apsaras were assumed in my honour?

I found all the little Indian fairies assembled at the college in their dazzling array. It was holiday time, it seems, but they consented to give up a morning for me. A little one advances and presents me with one of those highly scented and formal bouquets in which flowers and gold thread are mingled.

It is the Maharajah's pleasure to diffuse education in his kingdom, education which has but proved a scourge to us, but which will be beneficent at Travancore, since faith has not ceased to irradiate all earthly things. His Highness had also wished to show me a rare and unexpected spectacle in connection with this college of noble ladies which quite equals or even excels our own; and the word of command had been issued to the parents that the little ones should be decked in the heavy jewels of their mothers and grandmothers. Youthful arms and swelling bosoms glittered with ancient jewellery, set in matchless archaic mountings, such as the goddesses of the temples wear.



A HINDOO LADY.



The class-rooms were like those of our European colleges, light and simply furnished, with geographical charts and instructive models hanging on the white-washed walls. But the strange scholars all looked like idols, from the little ones whose great black eyes glittered, and whose dark bronze skins were seen between their loin-cloths and their golden corselets, up to the older ones, who wore a veil of white Indian muslin over their dark coiled hair, and who already wore the grave and anxious expression of approaching womanhood.

Essays of style and historical compositions are shown me, also pretty drawings after European models that the little goddesses had made, quite in the manner of our own children; they were signed with names many syllables in length—melodious names that read like a phrase of music.

A little one of five or six had copied an eagle of complicated plumage standing on a branch; but she had commenced in the middle of the paper without taking measurement, yet, though there was no room left for the head, she had sketched it all the same flattened and widened out, extending to the edges of the paper, and not a detail or a feather was omitted, and she had bravely signed her beautiful name—Apsara.

I see gold-embroidered velvets and veils diaphanous as mists; diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and transparent enamels; many bracelets, some so large that they must be held on to the little arms by thread; necklets made from scarce Portuguese coins, which dated from Goa's times of splendour, and which have slept for centuries in coffers of sandal wood.

Finally, there are songs, pieces of music for violins, and then dances—slow and complicated dances that have a religious tinge, consisting of a series of rhythmic steps and a waving of jewel-laden arms.

These pupils, belonging to castes never seen by strangers, are all beautiful, refined, and graceful, and have eyes such as one can but see in India. Oh!

how can I describe the impression of chaste and transcendent beauty that these mysterious little flowers have given me ?

## IX

*Saturday, 30th December*

I leave Travancore to-morrow morning, where many more favours have been showered on me than I deserve, seeing that I have simply acquitted myself of the agreeable duty of offering a cross to the prince. I shall go northward in one of the great decked boats belonging to the Maharajah, by way of the chain of lakes, and it will take me about two days and two nights to reach the little kingdom of Cochin, where I shall stop for a while. After that there will be a journey of thirty to forty hours outside Cochin, then I shall come to the more frequented regions, where the railroads run, and I shall rejoin the main line from Calicut to Madras.

As this is my last evening in Trivandrum, I linger longer than usual in the groves which run through the town, where feeble lamps burn dimly under the shade of the dense palms whose conquering night they are powerless to dispel.

The subjugating yoke of plant life is even more apparent now, when everything is wrapped in a magnificent fall of green, than it is in the daytime.

I am leaving to-morrow morning, though I have seen hardly anything, and have in no way penetrated the secret heart of India ; I have divined nothing of the Brahminism of which this country is one of the centres, for everything seems barred to Europeans, even though the most gracious hospitality be extended to them.

My chance wanderings finally bring me to the street of the merchants, the great straight street that leads to the inclosure which guards the palaces and temples ; the sky is clear and the night starry. Crowds of long-haired men wander under the light.

of antique lamps which are supported by tall thin stalks. These are buyers and sellers of hammered copper-printed muslins, idols, and Brahmin images—everywhere a press of naked chests, black heads of hair, and sparkling dark eyes. Stalls where roots, grain, and cakes, the frugal nourishment of the Brahmins, are displayed; myriads of little shops, always lit by the same kind of ancient lamps, whose double or triple flames are supported by figures of monsters or of gods.

The porch of the sacred inclosure is seen at the end of the street in the same direction, but much farther on the great temple, through whose open door the inner depths, outlined by thousands of little flames, are visible; there is the sanctuary of Brahma, the soul of this land of dreams and meditation.

The whole building is illuminated, even to the depths where the priests alone may venture; the nave is outlined by points of flame that cluster towards the centre into a geometrical pattern; this must be a gigantic chamber, but it is too far off for me to distinguish. As ever, people are playing within, for the sound of music and the braying of trumpets reaches me, mingled with the long murmurs of human voices. The door that I may not cross stands ever open, and above it the huge pyramid, which I know to be composed of a mass of stone-carved gods, raised its head through the thin mists till its jagged summit seems to mingle with the stars. It is usual in times of solemnity, such as the present one, when prayers and supplications are unending, to light a trail of little flame on each of the four pyramids; these little fires commence above the doors and climb up amongst the black masses of the sculpture till they seem to trace a road to heaven through the ranks of stone-carved gods.

At length the street becomes deserted, and the shopkeepers commence to close their wooden shutters and to kindle the little lamps that stand in niches in the walls, and which serve to keep evil spirits from



the houses. I watch the merchants finishing their daily reckoning. The tiny round silver or copper coins of Travancore are collected in a bag, then they take handfuls of them on a counting-board, which consists of a plank furnished with holes; a little piece of money drops into each hole, and when the board is quite full one knows the exact number; then these are shaken into a chest and the reckoning recommences. Others write down figures and make calculations on bands of dried palm-leaf, which look like ancient papyri, and I fancy that I am back in olden times.

At length the hour has come when all signs of life cease, save the little lights on the walls and the more distant illuminations of the temples; all is plunged in gloom and silence. No women are visible, for they have all disappeared into the dwelling-houses; but the men who have knotted up their hair are seen shrouded in white linen or muslin cloths, lying on the terraces or under the verandas, or even before the doors amongst the goats; with the repulsion that all Indians feel for roofs and ceilings, these men prefer to sleep in the mild, warm night filled with the scent of flowers, where all seems veiled in a bluish dust.

## X

*Sunday, 31st December*

When the sound of the morning prayer rising from the sanctuary ceases to be heard, and as the harshly croaking crows disperse in the gray dawn, it is time to start, so I take my seat in the carriage which is to conduct me to the "port" of Trivandrum. Once again at the exquisite hour of sunrise I shall pass through the groves of coco-palms in which the town is hidden, but it will be for the last time.

The stormy wind that has raged during the night has deposited blood-red dust upon the walls of mud and on the thatched roofs, giving more than ever.

the impression of houses illuminated by the glow of a red fire, but above them the palms that have been bathed in the freshness of the night have an almost supernatural green, tinged with glints of emerald. Here and there bunches of flowers hang down in a falling shower from the summits of the trees till they reach to the ground.

Pickets of the Maharajah's soldiers, looking magnificent in their turbans and accoutrements, pass and re-pass on their way to relieve outlying posts. Throngs of people are calmly proceeding to mass, for it is Sunday, and I see little girls veiled in muslins holding prayer books in their hands; nearly all these are Christians of old race, whose ancestors worshipped Christ several centuries before our own. We hear the tolling of the bells of the strange Syrian or Catholic chapels that are built close to the temples of Brahma, and are sheltered by the same verdant palms. The enchanting scene gives an impression of peaceful calm, in which order and tolerance reign supreme.

At length the wharf is reached. It will readily be understood that the port of Trivandrum is not situated on the ocean, but on the lagoon, for the coast of this country is inaccessible.

My boat, which belongs to the prince, lies motionless amidst a hundred others; it is a sort of long galley for fourteen rowers, having a cabin on the poop in which it is possible to lie down and sleep. These fourteen rowers ply paddles with bamboo handles, and form a wonderful automatic machine of bronze humanity, instinct with force and vitality.

The lagoon, which at first was deep and narrow and shut in by a thick hedge of palms, gradually widens and becomes sunlit. Our rowers work themselves up to a pitch of excitement with songs and cries, cleaving the foul and sluggish waters rapidly, and so begins the peaceful journey which will last three days.

On both shores palms mingled with many-stemmed

banyan trees form an endless hedge, whilst garlands of unknown flowers hang from the branches, and great spotted and twisted water-lilies spring from amongst the rushes.

Barques which are going to Trivandrum pass us continually, for the lagoon is the chief high-road of the peaceful country. Huge boats, like gondolas, that pursue their slow and noiseless course, impelled by statuesque boatmen furnished with long poles, these have houses on their poops, filled with Indian men and women whose black eyes stare with wonder at our fast boat, manned by fourteen rowers.

Sometimes a marvellous bird, brighter and more gorgeous than our kingfishers, skims quickly along the surface of the water, with a cry of joy ; and there are beds of flowering lilies, and masses of lotus sheeted with rosy blooms.

The interminable lagoon that serves as a highway changes its appearance hourly. Sometimes it is narrow and shady, sometimes overhung like a church nave by coco-nut palms, whose ribs resemble arches ; at other times it enlarges and expands and seems to extend to infinite distances ; then it narrows and the space between the serried banks of palms is dotted with countless green islands.

The sun rises, and in spite of the shade and the moving water I feel myself gradually overcome by the stifling heat. Our speed is undiminished as the chief excites the men from time to time by an imperious clack of the tongue, causing their muscles to stiffen as if they had been struck with a lash, and to which they reply with falsetto cries like those of monkeys. Trailing grasses, branches of lilies, and floating reeds swim quickly past our swiftly flying boat.

It is ten o'clock, and we are no longer sheltered by the palms, but journey under the blue sky along a narrow passage bordered by shrubs bearing white flowers. The two symmetrical rows of bronzed flesh continue the mechanical movements—which have

already lasted for six hours—merely a few drops of perspiration trickle down bodies which shine with the polished reflection of metal in the terrible rays of the sun. A wild luxuriance of flowers hangs from the shrubs standing by the shore, the white colour of which stands out harshly against the deep blue sky; these trees fruit and flower at the same time, scattering plentiful and useless fruits on the water like a hail of golden apples. My boatmen still continue to row, but they now sing in a dreamy manner like that of men wearied with healthy fatigue, whilst their shining teeth are uncovered by a vacant smile.

We pass an inhabited region where there are villages, pagodas, and old churches in the Hindoo style that even the Syrian churches have adopted.

Our waterway suddenly narrows and is hedged in by banks of fern; then we plunge into dim gloom, filled with the scent of earthy freshness; we are traversing the long tunnel that the Maharajah has constructed so that boats may reach the more distant lagoons, those of the north, which we shall reach this evening, and travel on to-morrow.

The noise of our paddles reverberates through the tunnel, and as we pass other boats that loom out of the shade like black shadows, our oarsmen utter cries, which are long repeated by melancholy echoes.

Now that midday has come, we change our gang of men. Once through the tunnel we find ourselves again in an open space dotted with palm-covered islands; a village hidden by trees stands close by the shore, and fourteen fresh rowers await us there. Relays of men are stationed thus at points awaiting orders for the Maharajah's boats.

The fresh men take their places with much noise and excitement, call out like merry children, vie with each other in rowing and laughing, and their white teeth sparkle as they sing. Some are Christians, and wear a scapular across their naked chests; others have the seal of Siva painted on their foreheads, and

the three horizontal lines of Siva traced in gray dust on their arms and chests.

Palms everywhere, a splendid monotony of palms, so many that one is wearied and almost afraid of them. When one thinks that more than two hundred miles of the country round us is given up to their dominion, a feeling of distress is experienced akin to the sentiment that the ancients used to name "the horror of forests."

Palms everywhere, never-ending palms. There are those which rear their plumed heads high into the air, supported by long frail stems; others again which, like young trees, spring from the surface in the damp warm earth; but all have the same intense green and the same glossy freshness. They shine in the sunlight as if they had been varnished, whilst below them the lagoons look like mirrors of polished tin.

My boatmen display a terrible energy, though the sun beats directly on them with such force that white men could not survive it. They row for hours, the muscles of their arms slackening and tightening under their networks of swollen veins, singing the while at the top of their voices. Sometimes a sudden frenzy seems to seize them, their song becomes panting and broken, and they strike the water so furiously that the foam commences to fly and their oars break. The paintings in honour of Siva disappear, washed away by the sweat which runs down their bodies.

Towards evening the lagoon narrows again, and is inclosed by steep shores covered by ferns and trailing plants. Around us there are hundreds of boats lying at rest, and above our heads rises a bridge of sculptured stone. It is the town of Quilon, one of the large towns of Travancore, and, like that city, is embowered in gardens; for a while the palms are replaced by trees more nearly resembling our own, and I can even discern lawns and rose bushes.

A large stairway descends to the water, and I can

see the white colonnaded house which has been uninhabited, I am told, for a long while ; the Dewan has given orders that my evening meal should be prepared there. It is nightfall as we reach the shore, and Indian serving-men, in costumes white as the house itself, hasten to the steps to bid me welcome, and to offer me a bouquet of roses on a silver salver. We are to stop here an hour or two whilst my boatmen rest.

After supper I wander round the lonely garden and give myself up to meditation. I dream that I am in an old French garden, fallen somewhat into neglect, but where Bengal roses still cluster round the paths. The sky still retains a note of sombre red where the sun has set—the same dull glow that is seen on our warmest summer days.

Through the stillness of the calm night, sweet and ever-haunting impressions of my childhood days come back to me ; as usual I give myself up to the sad play of my imagination, a melancholy sport that I never weary of indulging in. It was in an abandoned garden surrounded by woods that I received my first impressions of nature, and I dreamt my first dreams of the warm countries on some burning August or September evening when just such a glow lit up our flat horizon.

The same scent of jasmine filled the air in those summer days of old, and the dark wings of bats and owls flitted noiselessly across the copper-coloured sky.

The bats that fly round this house are much larger, but their silent and capricious flight resembles that of our own ; they, however, belong to the larger species called vampire or roussette, and their huge wings scare away my dreams. Then, suddenly from under the great trees which encircle the garden with their shadows, issues a sound of horns and sacred bagpipes ; it is the hour of Brahma, and I can hear the murmurs of human voices chanting the evening prayer in the recesses of the temple.

Suddenly silence reigns once more, but this time it is pervaded by a nameless melancholy that was not there before. The thought crosses my mind that it is the 31st of December, 1899, and in a few hours the century, which was that of my youth, will pass away for ever. The stars above my head pursuing their almost endless course fill my thoughts with the fearful notion of eternity, and of our poor moth-like existence; and the death of the present century and the birth of the succeeding one, which will be my last, seem to be insignificant nothings when one thinks of the endless terrifying flight of ages. Agonizing thoughts of death and of our short existence are old and familiar, but to be surrounded by these woods and temples, and to think that I am in the heart of Brahmin India, gives me a strange and delightful thrill; this old garden, with its roses and jasmines, seems to conjure up vague and unspeakable impressions in which sentiments of exile mingle with a feeling in other countries, but as the years go by it becomes dimmed, like everything else; this evening it is soon blunted by bodily fatigue, for in the warm languorous night sleep quickly overtakes me.

The stars shine brightly as we resume our journey at nine o'clock; our men are now rested, and will row us for two miles to the village where a fresh relief awaits us.

The slow boats that we had already passed on our way begin to drop behind us once more; their black outlines are enlarged and doubled by the reflections of the water that gives them the appearance of spectral gondolas.

The many-creeked lagoon, which has now widened out like the sea, soon becomes lit up by fires; they are the lanterns of the fishermen and great torches which they use to attract fish, burning bundles of reed, which they swing continually in order to keep them alight. All these flames are reflected by the surface of the shining water, on which the night wind

has traced a few delicate ripples. Though the monotonous rhythm of the paddles begins to make me drowsy, the sentiment of the intense life which animates these swamps is ever present. It is truly a primitive life, however, that hardly differs from that of our first lake-inhabiting ancestors.

## XI

After a warm night, during which the balanced swing of our oars has never ceased, the first dawn of the new century rises fresh and rosy upon a world ever hunting and watching for its fishy prey in the clear morning light. The immense lagoon, surrounded by thick clusters of overhanging palms, is thronged with innumerable fishing-boats, which often brush past us and cause us to slacken; sometimes these boats are stationary, at others they wander along stealthily, making as little noise as possible; men stand in superb postures on the floating planks, holding nets, lines, and lances in their hands, watching all that moves in the water. Birds, pelicans, and herons of all kinds stand on the muddy shore and dart their inquisitive eyes in all directions, so that besides hooks, nets, and barbed forks, there are always hundreds of beaks on the watch. These voracious multitudes are attracted and maintained by the shoals of cold-blooded and silent little beings of which the lagoon is the inexhaustible reservoir; and the commencement of the new century will do nothing to change a mode of life which must have existed since the beginning of time.

As the banks draw closer we can perceive under the great palms tiny human habitations belonging to people whose very existence is dependent on that of the trees, they are barriers made from palm fibres extending from one tree to another, thatches made from palm, mats, nets, and cords made from palm.

These precious trees not only give them shelter, fruit, and oil, but also supply nearly every necessity



of those that live under them, and indeed this part of India could exist without the rice-fields which wave here and there in the wind-like expanses of bluish silk.

The lagoons gradually expand, and a slight but favourable wind rises, so my boatmen hoist a mat some three or four metres high upon a mast. What with sails and paddles, our speed grows faster across this peaceful little ocean whose shores are forests, that have a bluish look in the distance. Helped by the wind which fills the mast, the men slacken their energies and commence to hum a different song, a sleepy melody which issues through their closed teeth, and seems like a never-ending peal of bells heard from a great distance.

It is almost midnight in France, the hour at which the twentieth century begins, and the New Year's Festival should be at its height in our land of icy gloom.

The wind commences to fall, and at midday there is a dead calm, and the heat is like that of a stove. We make for the palm-covered shore in order to land the morning relay of men, who withdraw with profound salutes. Our new gang of men set out at a furious speed; they are of a lighter bronze and wear necklets and earrings, and sacred emblems are traced in gray dust on their breasts. Now the air bears on us with an unaccustomed weight, and seems as if charged with warm vapour. The sky, the dull surface of the lagoon, and the surrounding objects look faded and tarnished in the excessive light, whilst their outlines seem mingled and confused in a glow of dazzling pallor. In marked contrast with this dimness are the drops of water which ripple by our boat and trickle from the paddles and seem to shine from the foreheads and chests of our rowers.

Towards three o'clock we cross the boundary which separates Travancore from the little kingdom of Cochin; but the surface of the water and the palm forests that have followed us since our departure remain unchanged.

Towards the close of the day, however, towns appear on both banks which lie about the same distance from one another as those of a great river.

The town on the right bank, the one close to us, is Ernakulum, the capital where the Rajah resides ; by the water's edge there are four Syrian churches which look like pagodas, a great Brahmin temple, barracks and schools, red-coloured buildings standing on reddish soil, but neither a boat nor a human being by the landing-place. The dwellings of the haughty Brahmins are concealed under the bluish shade of the encroaching palms, or are hidden amidst trailing plants and ferns, and lie far removed from these sad, pretentious buildings.

Signs of life are, however, visible farther along the left bank. First we pass Matancheri, an Indian trading town, with its thousands of little houses nestling under the trees. The town is situated on a bay communicating with the ocean, and countless boats are riding at anchor ; sailing-boats with strange masts belonging to the olden times, which have never ceased to plough the Arabian Sea on their way to trade with Muscat, some even taking grains and spice to Bussorah and the head of the Persian Gulf. A good deal farther on we come to the old Cochin of the Dutch and Portuguese, now fallen into the hands of other masters ; here and there is a port where modern vessels vomit forth their clouds of dense black smoke.

• In the middle of the lagoon, and far removed from the three dissimilar towns, there is a wooded island, a sort of park filled with old trees, to which my boat directs its course (half concealed by verdure). I can see white stairways and a white landing-place, and farther back an old white palace. It appears that I am to be quartered here by order of the Rajah of this country, whose guest I am. Neglect and decay are apparent everywhere, and the house, standing amidst lawns and huge trees, reminds me of the enchanted home of the Sleeping Beauty, and the gathering

twilight renders my arrival at the lonely isle more melancholy still.

As at Quilon, white-robed serving-men throng the steps and offer me roses, and on my way I pass through an exquisite old garden, with straight walks overhung with roses and jasmine, fashioned in the olden style.

There is nothing but the house on the island, and I am alone in the house. During the times when the territory of Cochin belonged to the Low Countries, this mansion was the residence of the Dutch Governor. It is as massive as a fortress, and the galleries and verandas form a charming series of festooned arches, such as are seen in an old mosque. Within, the colonial luxury of former days, immense whitewashed rooms carpeted by old mats of a fineness that is unknown now; precious old wood carvings; furniture made in India after European models of quaint shape and antiquated style; on the walls coloured prints representing silk, which has faded to a delicious tint.

A messenger has been dispatched to warn me that I shall not see the Rajah who offers me hospitality, as he is at present in mourning. A little prince of the blood, who was quite young, almost a baby, has just closed his black eyes for ever, and the funeral rites absorb the attention of everybody of the palace.

I would have much preferred to stop at Matancheri, in some humble "Travellers' Rest," where I would have been free to mingle with the evening life of the people, than to reside in this official solitude. Both here and at Travancore I am in India, at the same time shut out from it.

The well-mannered and silent serving-men, whose movements have something stealthy about them, light the lamps hanging from the fretted arches; and when I have finished my prisoner's repast, which is served at a table decorated somewhat strangely with flowers and leaves, I wander into the garden to see the first sunset of the century. A dull glow still pervades the eastern horizon on which the trees trace

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black hieroglyphics; daylight lingers for a few moments, and owls and huge bats with noisy wings circle madly through the still warm air. Then all at once the stars commence to shine, and night falls quite suddenly.

### XII

In the morning, directly the red sun has appeared my boat is in readiness at the foot of the great stairway to take me across the lagoon towards Matancheri where I am to visit the Jews' quarters.

After the destruction of the second temple Jerusalem, which occurred in the year 3828 of Creation, 3168 of Tribulation, and 8 of the Christian era, about 10,000 Jews and Jewesses came to Malabar and settled at Cranganore, which at that time was called Mahodraptna. They were received with tolerance, and from then till now this little colony, which is as much shut off from the nearest Indians as it is from the rest of the world, has kept its ancient traditions intact just like some historic curiosity in a museum.

Matancheri, which must be crossed from one end to the other in order to reach the town of the "white Jews" (as they are called here), is a sort of pure native market, where all the faces have a brown tinge, and where the open wooden shops clustering at the foot of slender-stalked palms look low and insignificant.

I had already proceeded more than half a mile, and my eyes had grown quite accustomed to the native aspect of the place, when the road suddenly turned and I was surprised to see a sinister-looking old street that had the appearance of being strangely out of place; high stone houses closely packed together with sullen-looking façades with narrow windows like those of colder countries. The faces of Jews were visible everywhere—at the windows, doors, and in the street—and their appearance was as surprising as

sudden change in the character of the dwellings. The decaying sadness and walled-in isolation of this town seemed to assort ill with its setting of sky and palms ; after taking this sudden turning one is no longer in India, and the mind becomes bewildered, and we no longer know where we are ; perhaps in the corner of a Leyden or Amsterdam ghetto that has been transported to a land whose tropical sun has baked and cleft its walls. Doubtless this quarter was built by the Dutch in imitation of those of the Mother Country about the time of the early colonizations, when the art of adapting buildings to the climate was not understood ; and after their departure these Jews of Cranganore must have taken possession of the abandoned dwellings. Jews, nothing but Jews, a pallid Jewry, whose blood has been impoverished by the stifling houses and the Indian climate contrary to all recognized theory ; two thousand years of residence in Malabar have not in any way modified Jewish faces. They are the same people, dressed in the same long robes, that one meets at Jerusalem or at Tiberius ; young women with delicate features, old wretches with hooked noses, sly-looking children with pink and white complexions, who wear curl-papers over each ear just as their brothers do in Canaan.

These folk come to their doorsteps to see the passing stranger, for smiling welcome, and I should doubtless be courteously received at any house that I might visit.

To-day there are, at the most, but a few hundreds of these exiles who, as tradition tells, once numbered ten thousand ; a sojourn which has lasted nearly two thousand years, and the depressing climate, have weakened even their enduring race ; it appears that they live by usury and other underhand commerce, and even when they are rich pretend not to be. The interiors of the houses of two or three of the chief inhabitants, where I rested awhile, presented the same aspect of ruin, decay and filth, together with semi-darkness and the smell of a wild beasts' den ; I saw

old furniture in the European style, which must have dated from the time of the Dutch, perishing from rottenness; mosaic images and Hebrew inscriptions ranged round the walls.

The synagogue is at the end of the street, and has a melancholy-looking little belfry, quite warped by time and split with heat. After having passed the first door, we find ourselves in a courtyard whose walls are as high as those of a prison. The sanctuary occupies the centre, and though it is but eight o'clock, the whitewashed temple gleams in the morning sun. There is perhaps no other synagogue in the world where an ancient style of decoration of such an unknown manner is preserved. The crude colours, which time has faded a little, have a singular charm, and there are green doors painted with strange flowers, porcelain pavements of a marvellous blue, milky white walls, glowings of red and gold round the tabernacle, and the surprising radiance of many columns and gratings of turned copper which have been polished like mirrors by the continual rubbing of human hands. Many multi-coloured crystal lustres of ancient make, that must have come from Europe at the time of the early colonization, hang from the ceiling.

Some sallow-faced, long-nosed men dressed in long robes, who were mumbling prayers, rise, book in hand, to welcome me, and a tottering old rabbi, who seems a hundred years old at least, advances to meet me. The magnificence of the carefully turned copper columns is first pointed out to me, and I am asked to note the extraordinary polish. Then my attention is directed to the really priceless pavement of blue porcelain, so rare that one scarcely dares to walk upon it; it was made in China six hundred years ago, and brought here by sea at great expense.

Finally the tabernacle, which was covered by a long silk cover worked in gold thread, is unbarred; it contains tiaras set with gems of a design primitive as the crown of Solomon, which on certain occasions serve

to deck the head of the ancient rabbi ; there are also holy books and rolls of parchment, wrapped in cases of black silk embroidered with silver, whose age can no longer be ascertained.

At last the relic of relics is disclosed : the bronzed tablet, that priceless record on which were written some three centuries after the arrival of the Jews in India, in the year 4139 of Creation, 3479 of Tribulation, 319 of this Christian era, the rights and privileges granted to them by the king who then reigned in Malabar.

The characters graven on these venerable tables read somewhat after this fashion : “ By the help of God who made the world and set up kings, we, Ravi Vurma, Emperor of Malabar, in the 36th year of our glorious reign here in the fort of Maderecatla Cranganore, grant these rights to the worthy Joseph Rabban. 1st. That he may make proselytes among the five castes. 2nd. That he may enjoy all honours ; that he may ride elephants and horses with all due pomp ; that his titles may be proclaimed by heralds ; that he may use lights in the daytime and that he may make use of all manner of musical instruments ; that he is allowed to carry a large parasol, and to walk on white carpet which may be spread out before him ; finally that he may cause marches to be sounded on his armour as he advances under a canopy of state. We grant these rights to Joseph Rabban, and to 72 Jewish landowners, together with the government of his own people, who are beholden to obey him, and to him and his heirs so long as the sun may shine on the world.

“ This charter is given in the presence of the King of Travancore, Trecenore, Calli Quilon, Krengoot, Tamorin, Tamorin Paliathachen, and Calistria.

“ Written by the Secretary, Kalambi Kelapour. As Parumpadpa, the Rajah of Cochin, is my heir, his name is not included among these.

“ Signed Cherumprumal Ravi Vurma,  
“ Emperor of Malabar.”

Above the synagogue, close by the side of the cracked belfry, there is a lofty room to which I am taken : here everything is in a state of unconceivable decay and dilapidation ; there are shapeless beams and ruinous walls, and the flooring is full of holes, and bats slumber near the black ceiling. Through narrow windows, pierced like loopholes through the thick walls, the little Dutch town, now passed into Israelitish hands, is seen standing sad, gray, and worn at the feet of the huge palms, whose great heads fill the background, and which merge at once into the forest, whose changeless green extends as far as the eye can reach. On the other side we overlook the thatched roof of a very ancient Brahmin temple, whose low copper cupola seems to crush it against the surface of the burning soil.

This lofty room, this ruin full of shade and spiders' webs, is the school of the little "white Jews." About twenty of them are assembled here, taking advantage of the early morning freshness in order to study Leviticus ; a rabbi, who resembles the prophet Elias, traces passages of Hebrew on a blackboard—for these children of exile still speak the ancestral language now fallen into neglect amongst their Eastern kin.

After the quarter of the "white Jews" comes that of the "black Jews," who are the rivals and enemies of the first. I had been warned that I should give much offence if I did not go to see them and their synagogue after having visited the others. Some were even stationed at the entrance of their street, waiting to see if I would come, whilst above me I could perceive rows of pale, emaciated "white Jews'" faces behind the half-raised curtains, or looking curiously to see which direction I might take.

Let me go to see the poor "black Jews," who pretend that they arrived from India several centuries before the "white Jews," notwithstanding that the white ones proclaim disdainfully that they are only ancient pariahs who have been converted by their teachings.



They are more tanned than their neighbours, but not black, far from it, though they appear to be half-bred between Israelites and Indians. They hasten to bid me welcome. Their synagogue much resembles its rival, but is less rich, and has neither the beautiful copper columns nor the marvellous Chinese porcelain pavement. Just now they are celebrating a service for the children, who are assembled there with their noses buried in their books, and who rock themselves like bears in the orthodox manner of the Mosaic rite. The rabbi made bitter complaints about the pride of their rivals of the neighbouring street, who would never contract marriage nor even hold intercourse with his parishioners. To crown their misery, he told me that the Grand Rabbi of Jerusalem, to whom a collective plaint for intervention had been addressed, had contented himself by replying with this rather offensive generality: "It is only sparrows of the same colour that nest together."

The granite-walled temple with the copper cupola and the roof of thatch that we first saw from the summit is one of the most primitive and sullen-looking buildings of this coast; it is needless to say that it is as impenetrable as the temples of other places. In an empty and dismal courtyard, whose high granite walls collect the stifling rays of the sun, there are some strange objects of iron and bronze, many-branched candelabra, I am told, whose surfaces have been corroded by the storms of centuries.

Close to, and communicating with the temple by galleries, is an ancient palace of the Rajahs of Cochin, abandoned some time since for the new residence of Ernaculum that lies upon the opposite shore. It looks like a heavy, square, old fortress, though it is impossible to determine the precise age of a building in this country where chronology is interwoven with fables and symbols; but it gives the impression of extreme antiquity, and the moment we enter we have the impression of an unknown something that must date from a ruder age.

The few little windows, all of which have stone seats carved underneath them, serve to show the thickness of the walls. All the staircases, even those leading to the rooms of state, are steep, dark, and stifling, hardly wide enough for a single person, and have a look of childish savagery. The rooms, too, are long, low, and dark, and have an oppressive and prison-like air.

The ceilings are carved into complicated panels, roses, and pendentives out of precious woods that still retain their deep colours, with here and there a few traces of painting. The walls, on the contrary, have been left flat, and are absolutely smooth from one end to the other; at the first glance I thought that they were covered by a stuff of many-coloured design, but the semi-darkness deceived me, for they are painted. The whole palace is decorated with frescoes; some are slightly damaged by time, but others are in as perfect a state of preservation as some of the paintings on the Egyptian tombs. Oh! what astonishing frescoes, frescoes of a special type, in which art displays a prodigal and exuberant luxury: masses of nude forms, in which anatomical details are closely reproduced, though the Indian type of beauty is somewhat exaggerated and the wrists too fine and the breasts too prominent.

Confused swarms of interlacing arms, intermingled thighs, arched backs, and swelling chests. The ankles and the wrists are braceleted, the foreheads are crowned, and necklets adorn the throats. Animals also figure in this debauch of copper-coloured flesh.

There is not a trace of furniture; all is empty. Nothing but complicated ceilings, which seem to crush everything with their weight, and these frescoes resembling tapestries, that cover the walls of all these galleries and prolong the nightmare of animal and human flesh into the remotest and darkest chambers.

The centre room, larger and higher than the rest, is the one in which the rajahs were crowned; there

the frescoes represent a group of cloud-encircled goddesses who are in travail in the midst of a huge crowd of nude spectators.

The sleeping-chamber of the rajahs is the only room that is furnished now, and there a boat-shaped bed, made of panels of precious woods, still offers the repose of its brocaded mattress.

The bed is suspended from the ceiling by red silken cords, for serving-men were accustomed to rock the sovereign to sleep after his meals. Around the royal couch the wall frescoes are of the most sensuous kind, and display an unbridled lasciviousness, and goddesses, men, animals, monkeys, bears, and gazelles roll their frenzied eyes in paroxysms of desire.

There is one other much dilapidated room in which a great bronze lamp burns smokily both night and day; here I am not allowed to enter, as somewhere in the dim background there is a communication with the temples.

It will soon be the midday hour, when every one must seek the shelter of a roof, and as my shady island is too far distant, I will go to Cochin and seek some "Traveller's Rest."

In a little hired carriage drawn by two fleet runners I pass once more through the Indian streets of Matancheri, which were so lately thronged with all the types and costumes of Malabar; now, however, everything seems overcome by midday slumber.

I soon reach Cochin, which is built upon a sand-bank stretching between the sea and the lagoon; an old colonial town that has undergone few changes, and in which Dutch influence is still visible.

The little house which gives me shelter overlooks the shore and the boundless ocean.

The great blue sea of Arabia stretches before me, and its sands glitter with a rose and white splendour under the vertical rays of the sun; crows and fishing-eagles fly around, uttering joyful cries, whilst a calm swell throws its breakers on the shore with peaceful monotony. Farther out, where the sea is

of a blue and polished tinge, the fins and backs of sharks that are watching for their prey are visible from time to time. But amidst all this dazzling magnificence the horizon is no longer to be seen.

Behind the hut which shelters me, and which is open on every side, the wood of coco-nut palms commences at once, and I can see the green light that filters through them; from my windows long branches and long feathered tufts of palm droop towards the ground, lit up with a green and luminous transparency that is exaggerated by the dull green background. Now a young Indian climbs noiselessly up a trunk, smooth as a column, ascending by aid of his toes with the ease and rapidity of a monkey in order to obtain the juice that comes from the veins of the leaves, and which is used as a drink; and this climbing man, who seems half animal in this silent and swift ascent, is the last impression that permeated through my half-closed eyes.

How I love to feel the deep and shining sea so near to me, and to hear its mighty throbbing! It is the highway that leads freely to all lands, the highway where one can breathe and see far around, and it is the road that I have always known. Truly life is more gladsome in its vicinity, and I find my old self again now that I am near it once more. For an instant I can imagine that I am no longer in this shady, confined, and incomprehensible Indian land.

## XIII

After my siesta it is time to return to my isle of the enchanted palace.

The sun is setting as I take my final departure in the boat with fourteen rowers which is to take me to Trichur, the most northerly town in the kingdom of Cochin, a journey that will occupy the entire night. As usual our start is magnificent. The rowers, who are quite rested, seem to snatch shovels full of water at each stroke of the paddles, and a sail has been

hoisted to help us. Once more we take the easy road of the lagoon, and the palm-covered banks fly quickly past us.

The evening sun, fast sinking behind the rampart of eternal verdure, droops and dies as ever in flames of rosy gold. A cloudless sky of strangely lovely tint is spread above our tranquil world ; once more we are in the midst of fisheries, boats, and spread-out nets, surrounded by the lake-like life we saw last evening—that life of olden days which still lingers upon these Indian lagoons, curtained in on all sides by forests of palms, whose mystery and depth seem increased by the growing twilight.

My boatmen hum once more through their closed mouths the song of yesterday. It appears that this refrain is suited to the hours of ease when, thanks to a favouring wind, they can paddle more heedlessly. Fishermen on the other boats chant the same melody, which does not seem to issue from human throats, but rather resembles a distant peal of church bells floating across the limpid waters from all directions.

This “Land of Charity” is peopled by thousands of beings who, beneath their shady palms, dream with a confiding simplicity of resurrection ; Christians, Brahmins, or Israelites all clinging to their old and venerable faiths which, however they may differ amongst each other, seem to contain a shadow of the same truths. I dream, too, of the childish hope that possessed me, that I might have been able to seize a few shreds of the intangible truth, that truth which is so sullenly guarded in the heart of this Brahmin faith. But no ; here, as everywhere else, I am the eternal stranger, the perpetual wanderer, who only knows how to appreciate the charm of strange surroundings. My dream is over too, for I am leaving, nursed by songs, in a handsome boat ; but even as it is I am amused, and perhaps this is the path which destiny has traced out for me, and with which I must be content.

The curtains of forest which are drawn all round

the horizon have an ever-deepening tone of blue, a blue that merges into black where the sun has sunk. Occasionally their monotonous line is broken by some gigantic tree that rears its black shadow against the sky. The planet Venus is the first of the stars to glimmer through the fading tones of rosy gold, then the moon appears by her side, but it is a moon such as one rarely sees, and only in the limpid air of hot countries. The crescent is faintly outlined by a thin, luminous edge, yet the whole surface can be distinguished with a wonderful clearness; one feels that it is lit up from behind and that it is no simple disc, but a ball suspended in transparent emptiness, and in spite of all the principles we have acquired, this somewhat shocks our primordial notions of equilibrium and weight. Darkness has at last overtaken us, and the boatmen have lit their fires in order to attract the fish. The songs have died away, and all seems to sleep, all but the sinewy limbs of my fourteen rowers, who hurry me towards the north during the whole night.

## XIV

*Wednesday, 3rd January*

There is a sudden conflagration as the sun rises from behind the thicket of palms. My boat had touched ground several times during the night, and now rests finally in the mud at the foot of a hill of red earth. We have reached the port of Trichur, where the lagoons end, and the waters are crowded by hundreds of other slumbering, gondola-prowed boats.

Trichur, a very ancient and conservative Brahmin town, stands half a mile farther on amongst the trees, but hardly any one is stirring there when I arrive in my ox-cart. The palms which shelter the thatched wooden houses are shaken by a cold wind, which raises clouds of fiery-coloured dust that looks

almost like powdered blood. With its little shops peopled by grain sellers and copper workers, and its lanes of hairy banyans, this town resembles all those other towns of Malabar which, hidden amidst the woods, continue their ancient modes of existence far from the coast and all modern things ; but its temple is particularly large and terrible, and it bears the name of Tivu Sivaya peria vur, which means Saint-Siva-great-town.

I alight in front of this temple, which is a fortress as well, and which sustained the siege of Tippoo, the formidable Sultan of Mysore, and climb up slopes on which herds of indolent sheep and zebus are still sleeping. On seeing my approach some Brahmins, who had stationed themselves in a doorway to meditate and to watch the sun rise, hasten anxiously to meet me. Did the stranger think ? . . . But I tell them that I know, and that I had merely come to admire the sculptured towers from a respectful distance. On hearing this the Brahmins, with many smiling salutes, retire to the sanctuary without troubling further about me. The heavy walls are whitewashed, but the four doors, crowned with monstrous sculptured towers that face the four winds of heaven, have still retained the warm and dark colour of Indian granite. These four red towers date from the earliest ages, and are decked with ornaments, colonnades, and barbaric figures.

Were it not for the wintry gusts of wind which sweep by everything, and which twist the hanging branches of the banyan trees, raising huge clouds of reddish-coloured dust, there would be nothing stirring in the town of Siva. By the roadsides there are peaceful nooks under trees where the people may pray ; in such spots we should have placed crucifixes in the olden days ; here these shady crossways are decked with granite altars, symbolic stones, and statues.

There are but few passers-by ; some dreamy-eyed men going to the temple, beautiful and proud in

their nudity, with their black masses of hair hanging to their loins, and their foreheads painted with the seals of Vishnu or of Siva ; nearly all wear the sacred cord across their breasts, which is the outward symbol of high caste. There are some women going to draw water whose figures are bent under the flashing copper urns which they carry on their shoulders ; draperies with many-coloured borders cover them, without in any way hiding their outlines. One of their swelling breasts is hidden by muslin, but the other, the right one, is always left uncovered ; their young bosoms are more developed than those of European races, and seem almost out of proportion with their delicate waists ; yet the outlines are matchless, and have served as models for those stone and bronze torsos that Hindoo sculptors have given to their goddesses from the remotest ages, torsos in which the feminine charms seem purposely heightened.

As I pass these women on the road, their glance meets mine almost stealthily ; it is very tender, but indifferent and far-away—an unintentional caress of the flaming black eyes—then suddenly their eyelids droop.

For the passing stranger they are like a thousand other things in this country, like the great temple itself—unfathomable.

I remain the guest of the Rajah of Cochin till I reach the frontier, and have only to allow myself to be conducted ; all has thoughtfully been provided for my morning journey to Trichur : the guide, the repast, and even the teams of oxen which will take me to Shoranur after a journey of three hours through villages, jungles, and woods.

Alas ! at Shoranur I shall have left the charming India that tourists never visit, and I shall find the ubiquitous railways, and from there I shall take the express train to Madras.





IN THE LAND OF THE GREAT  
PALMS



## CHAPTER IV

### IN THE LAND OF THE GREAT PALMS

#### I

#### THE WONDERFUL ROCK OF TANJORE

ABOVE the immense plains of this country of Tanjore and above the bushy kingdom of palms, which stretches out like the sea, a huge detached rock rears its head ;<sup>1</sup> standing sentinel, as it has done since the beginning of time, over a region from which it has seen the forests spring and the towns and temples grow. It is a geological oddity, a whim of some primaeval cataclysm, and looks like a helmet, or the prow of some Titan's ship, half-submerged in an ocean of greenery. It is two hundred metres high, and springs without warning from the neighbouring plain ; and its sides are so smooth, that even in this country, where vegetation conquers everything, no single plant has been able to find a foothold.

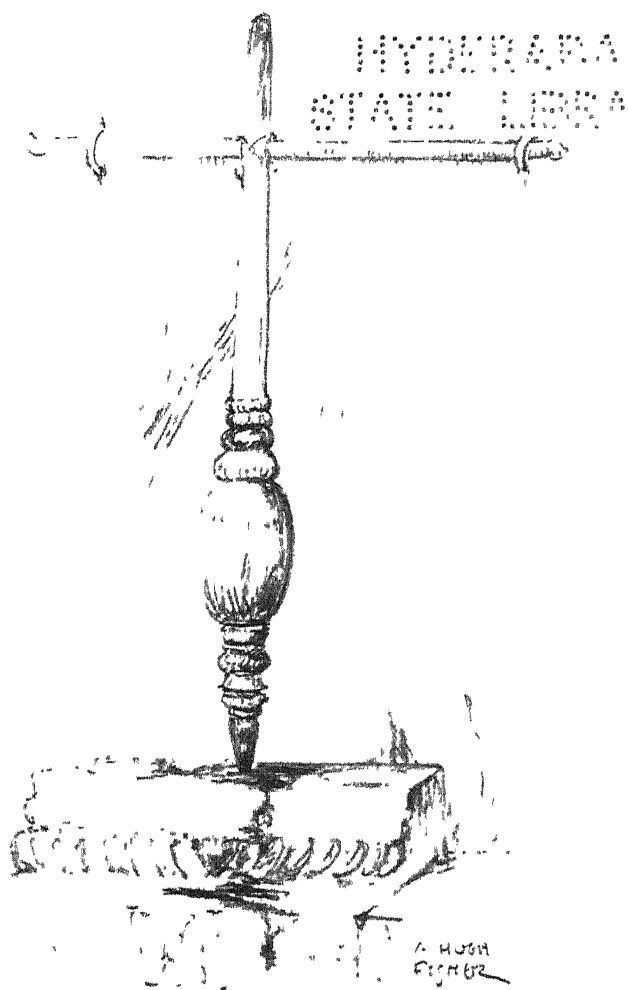
The early Indians, the great mystics of the olden days, naturally chose this as a place of worship, and for centuries have carefully hollowed out the rock so as to form galleries, stairways, and gloomy temples. Cupolas covered with beaten gold shine from the summit, and every night a sacred fire burns on the very top of the rock, and this fire, which has been kindled for centuries, can be seen shining like a lighthouse from the remotest parts of Tanjore.

As the sun rises on the native village built at the foot of the rock, there is a greater stir than usual, for

<sup>1</sup> The Rock of Trichinopoly.

a solemn Brahmin festival in honour of Vishnu takes place to-morrow, and since yesterday the natives have been occupied in weaving innumerable garlands of yellow flowers. The women and young girls, who are grouped round the fountain filling their copper urns, have already donned their festival attire, their finest bracelets, nose-, and ear-rings. The zebus attached to the carts have had their horns painted and gilt, and are decked with necklets, bells, and tassels of glass. Garland sellers almost block our passage with their displays of floral wreaths; Indian pinks, Bengal roses, and marigolds, threaded like pearls, are made into many-rowed boa-like necklets, from which hang flowers and ornaments of gold thread. To-morrow all the folk who go to their devotions, and all the gods stationed in the temples, will wear on their flesh, stone, or metal chests such ornaments of rose or yellow flowers. The housewives, who were stirring directly the dawn appeared, hasten to trace geometrical figures on the carefully swept soil in front of their dwellings with the white powder that issues from the little box which they hold in their hands, and with which they weave fantastic designs like intermingling ribbons. One hardly dares to walk along the streets: these networks of white lines, with yellow carnations placed at the points of intersection, are so beautiful. The wind commences to rise, carrying with it clouds of the blood-coloured dust which gives a reddish tone to everything in Southern India, and within an hour all the tracery that has caused so much labour will be effaced.

The houses of the town are painted the colour of red brick, and have the fork of Vishnu inscribed above the door; all are very low and have thick walls, buttresses, and porches that remind me of the Egypt of Pharaoh's days. There are as many dwellings for the gods as there are for men, and nearly as many temples as there are houses; and on all the temples and amongst the reddish monsters crowning the



A WAYSIDE DIVINITY NEAR THE BASE OF THE ROCK,  
TRICHINOPOLY.

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breastwork of the walls, families of crows are perched who look at the passing crowds and watch for the spoils and all the scraps of filth that can serve as prey for them. A horrible idol can be seen in each of the little sanctuaries, whose doors are never closed; it is nearly always the elephant-headed Ganesa, decked with necklets of fresh yellow flowers which fall over his many arms and conceal his hanging trunk.

There are temples upon temples, holy bathing-places for the ablutions of the Brahmins, palaces, and bazaars.

There are mosques too, for the faith of Islam—that has triumphed in the north-west and centre of India—has filtered to some extent into this region of the great palms. How different from the Brahmin temples are these simple and geometrical arabesque-covered mosques that rise from between their slim minarets, and keep themselves white as those of Hedjaz in spite of the red dust which gives its tone to everything in this country.

A swarming as of an ant-heap, and the constant set of people in one direction suffices to guide me, even on the evening before the festival, towards the rock temple that dominates the town. It is made of three or four monstrous blocks that are without a crack and almost without a wrinkle; these stones have merely been thrown one on the other, and the sides, rounded like the flanks of animals and polished by running rain-water, hang over in a fearful manner. A veritable crowd of cawing crows whirls incessantly round the summit. A monumental stairway plunges into the dim recesses of the rock, between high granite columns of laboured design, and past thousands of steeples and idols which have been rendered almost shapeless by age. Some young elephants, that are sacred and descended from sacred parents, are standing by, nearly blocking up the entry; they are covered with little bells threaded in the same way as the garlands, and, as I pass, these elephants caress me with their trunks in babyish glee.



I commence to ascend the stairs, which almost suddenly plunge into darkness ; now religious music, whose volume is increased by the sonority of the grotto, fills the air, seeming to issue from the bowels of the earth.

I need not say that the rock is filled with a number of superposed temples, galleries, passages, and stairways ; some penetrating into mysterious darkness are interdicted to all but the priests. There are statues in every angle and corner ; some are colossal, whilst others are as tiny as gnomes, but all have crumbled with age and have only stumps instead of arms, and their faces are no longer recognizable. As I am not one of the faithful, I must keep to the great central gallery that is open to everybody, and which ascends between splendid columns hewn out of solid blocks. These columns are covered by figures and designs, but the bases, as far up as the height of a man, have lost all shape under the constant polishing which has continued for countless centuries by the nude figures who have pressed against them in these narrow passages. Formerly the walls, and even the pavements and steps, were covered with signs and inscriptions, but age and the rubbing of countless hands and naked feet have rendered them indistinguishable.

First we enter some low and stifling rooms, from which a sound of chanting issues out of the gloom, then higher up we come to a temple, as large as a cathedral, whose ponderous roof is upheld by a forest of columns. The profane are allowed to enter on condition that they do not advance too far ; so it is impossible to see where the temple finishes, and there are passages and sculptured grottos which disappear into the blackness of the rock. In a corner, near a hole through which light comes, some Brahmin children are engaged in the study of the holy books under the tutelage of an old man who is entirely covered with white hair. From the roof prodigious properties belonging to the Brahmin procession are

suspended—men, cars, horses, and elephants, all larger than their natural size, strange forms, carefully made from cardboard and painted, or tinselled paper stretched over a thin framework of bamboo.

Tribes of little birds, swallows or sparrows, in that anxiety of reproduction which characterizes the life of this land, have found time between two religious processions to fill these fantastic carcasses with their nests; so the confused forms of the suspended monsters are gay with the fluttering of wings and musical with the chirping of the young birds whose song falls like light hail on the ground below.

We have to mount higher yet. These polished walls, which are often of a single block, and the semi-darkness remind one of a catacomb; but a flood of sunlight suddenly pierces through a hole cut in the rock, and we see the pagodas and palm trees stretched far beneath us. There are also some stones which have been brought here as large as those of the early stone age; these have been thrown, pell-mell and unjointed, one on top of the other, but their huge weight keeps them in position, and time can never shift them from their place.

At every step we encounter Brahmins of superb form and appearance whose chests are daubed with ashes in honour of Siva, the god of death. They hurriedly ascend and descend, busied with the arrangements for to-morrow's festival, disappearing into the passages that are forbidden to me, and bringing out copper vases filled with water or bearing garlands to the gods I may not see.

There is yet another temple. I may not enter it, but only look in from the threshold. It is built over the one I have just left, but is much larger and more magnificent, and much lighter too, for there are many square openings in the roof through which the blue sky can be seen, through which the sunlight falls on the aedicules sheathed in their many-coloured and gilt ornaments.

Above this last sanctuary are the terraces from

which the plains of Tanjore may be seen extending as far as the eye can see, dotted with thousands of other temples that emerge from the green palms.

At last we reach the stone which forms the summit, a single block which the original volcanic disturbance has placed here somewhat unsteadily. This is the stone which looks like the prow of a ship or the crest of a helmet when it is seen from below. The sun is shining on its smooth sides as we ascend by one hundred and forty faintly traced steps, so narrow, worn, and sloping, that we cannot escape a feeling of giddiness.

It is on these final terraces, adorned with golden cupolas, that the sacred fire is nightly lit. Here also, in a dark and heavy kiosk, surrounded by iron bars like a wild beasts' den, the supreme idol is found; their god, the horrible black Ganesa, is the wild beast, and until one approaches quite close to the bars, his crouching form cannot be discerned. His elephant's ears and trunk fall over the protruding belly, and the stone body is half-clothed in gray, dirty, torn rags. Here the captive god, whose expression is fierce and cunning, reigns alone and supreme in the airy temple built above all the rest of temples, from which an uninterrupted stream of music and prayer has poured forth for the last two thousand years.

We stand far above the region of human habitation, and almost above the zone which the birds inhabit. Below us we see the whirling flights of crows and the eagles whose wings are stretched out motionlessly in the air. The country that we overlook is one where religion holds its extremest sway; temples are scattered everywhere, almost as abundantly as trees, and the red harvest of sacred pyramids emerges on all sides above the verdure. So plentifully do the sacred towers rise above the palms that from the height at which we are situated they resemble mole-hills in a field of grass. Those twenty-four monstrous towers down there, grouped like the tents of an encampment, belong to the temple of Chri Ragam,

the largest of the sanctuaries of Vishnu--where I am going to-morrow to see the passing of a solemn procession.

The town is situated at the base of the overhanging rock, and the complicated network of streets, the profusion of many-coloured temples, and the mosques, that are so white as to look bluish, are marked out as on a highly coloured map ; the holy ponds, which seem to swarm with black flies, shine like mirrors in the sun ; these are no flies, however, but Brahmins at their morning ablutions.

As at Malabar, the great coco-palms nearly cover the whole of the country, but in the midst of this forest of waving plumes, which extends on all sides of the horizon, there are some occasional gaps ; large yellow patches where the grass has been burnt up by the increasing dryness, which has caused a famine in the north-west provinces, and which is already causing anxiety to the people of Tanjore.

All the sounds of the animated and seething life below mingle as they rise up to us ; the noise of the joyful town, the rumbling of zebu carts, the tom-toms and bagpipes of the streets, the croakings of the eternal crows, the screams of eagles, the psalms from the many temples beneath our feet, and the brayings of the sacred horns that never cease to echo round the sides of the rock on which we stand.

## II

### AT CHRI RAGAM

The little " Travellers' Rest " at which I find shelter is about two miles from the wonderful rock and two leagues from the great temple of Chri Ragam, and is situated in a sunny cleaving where the feathery palms have been replaced by some mimosas, whose foliage is so poor and scanty that they do not give any shade. The dying trees and the burnt-up vegetation that surround us seem to stretch a warning finger over this

southern land of India, where everything is eternally damp and green, telling of the fearful drought from which the whole district of Radjiput is dying.

To reach Chri Ragam from my lodging, I have first to pass through the town at the foot of the overhanging rock, then to make a journey of an hour or two in a carriage under a vault of trees and palms of every age and every shape. On our way we pass endless temples of varied forms and age, and there are many stones and sculptured granite monuments over which the faithful have thrown flowers and garlands—such strange garlands—in readiness for to-morrow's festival. Over all the entrances and on every door the terrible seal of Vishnu, that three-pronged fork which is inscribed on the foreheads of the men, has been freshly re-painted in red and white colours. There are even specially sacred groves of palms which bear the ensign of the god ; the trunks, smooth as a column, have been entirely covered with red and white, so that it is hard to say where the temples end or the woods commence. The breath of adoration wafts over the whole of this consecrated place.

When at length we reach the sanctuary itself, an immense sanctuary which stands in seven inclosures, the first of which, containing twenty-one pyramids sixty feet high, is two leagues in circumference, a feeling of bewilderment, caused by the huge size and the profuse display of barbaric splendour, comes over us. The inconceivable plenitude of detail is as startling as the size of the building itself. All that I had ever read, all that I thought I knew, and all that I had ever seen at gorgeous performances of fairy spectacles is astonishingly surpassed here. We are also forced to recognize that our cathedrals, with their saints and angels, only compare with these huge red masses of solid rock on which a thousand divinities gesticulate with their twenty arms and twenty faces, as do our modest flowers with those that blossom here.

We enter an enormous inclosure that is older than

the sanctuary, but whose age is unknown, the work of a generation who had dreamt of a tower as large as that of Babel, but who never lived to finish their work. Access is gained by a doorway which is more than forty feet high, made of simple blocks ten to twelve metres long; at the crown of the archway there are indications of an unfinished pyramid, which would doubtless have struck terror into the minds of those who saw it, but probably its achievement was impossible. The whole structure has acquired a tone of reddish copper, and the sacred parrots, perched in groups on the projecting sculptures, look like patches of brilliant verdigris.

On the other side of the doorway there are magnificent avenues leading to the temples. These avenues extend through the various inclosures and are bordered by religious buildings, ponds, bazaars, gods seated in niches, and many stone kiosks supported on slim columns of antiquated design—everywhere the same four-sided Indian columns with their capitals formed by a group of hanging monsters. The door of each fresh inclosure is surmounted and overwhelmed by an indescribable pyramid, sixty feet high, made up of fifteen stories of colossal gods ranked one above the other. All the statues of the airy kingdom look upwards with thousands of eyes and gesticulate with thousands of arms; there are some who have twenty arms projecting in a fan-like manner from each of their sides, others with twenty faces which look in every direction, their heads adorned with tiaras, and they brandish lotus flowers, deaths' heads, and emblems of all sorts. Numbers of mythical animals force their way through the crowded ranks of the gods: peacocks with extravagant tails, or five-headed serpents. The stone has been carved and chiselled with so much boldness that each subject and each accessory seems to be independent of the rest and looks as if it might detach itself and spring to the ground. The pyramid on which these dense crowds are graven grows narrower as it rises, termi-

nating at length in a series of lance-like points. The almost unfading colours in which these men, beasts, robes, and adornments were painted still retain their brilliancy ; the predominant tone is blood-red, and seen from a distance each pyramid is red, but this tone alters as we get nearer, and patches of green, white, and gold become visible.

The last inclosure is reserved for Brahmins of pure race attached to the service of the gods, who live here with their families. At last we arrive at the temple proper, and see the sullen and defiant ramparts of its old crested walls rising before us, whilst the customary red pyramid of sculptured gods lowers over the dark and gloomy entrance. On each side of this last door are terraces on which elephants are chained. These beasts, which at present are engaged in swallowing some young trees that the faithful have brought, are very old and sacred. Scattered near, and contrasting strongly with the splendour of the mighty pyramids, of crowded figures, are objects that are almost barbaric, straw huts, simple little carts of ancient make, rude and primitive tools. Everything that clusters at the foot of the old rampart is ruined, worn, and imbued with traces of an uncivilized age that has long since disappeared.

The sun is setting, and it is almost too late to enter the temple, for twilight has already descended amongst the naves and arches of vaulted stones. If I enter, it is but to inquire about to-morrow's procession of the priests, who flit by like shadows lost in the wilderness of colonnades. The information I obtain is vague and contradictory ; it may be to-night . . . perhaps later . . . it would depend on the weather and on the moon. . . . I can see clearly that the priests are not anxious that I should be present.

However, in an echoing gallery, whose walls are decorated from one end to the other by two rows of fantastic tigers and horses reared on their hind legs, and of more than natural size, I meet a sweet-faced old priest who informs me it will most certainly be at



A MOHAMMEDAN TYPE.





daybreak, and says that to be more sure I had better spend the night in the temple itself.

I return to my carriage and make for the modest lodging to which hunger calls me. After that I shall return at once and sleep in the temple.

A beautiful silvery moon is shining as I leave my "Travellers' Rest" once more. So white is the moonlight that I should have thought that the walls and the bare ground were covered with snow. The moon's pale rays filter through the thin branches and delicate leaves of the mimosas just as they do through the branches of our trees when winter has stripped off their leaves; and the tiny flowers, like balls of down, resemble snowflakes and hoar frost. Can this be some northern territory that has wandered into the land of heat? Everything ceases to astonish in this wondrous land where fantastic and ever-changing images provide a constant feast of unexpected spectacle.

The wintry illusion fast melts away, and as soon as we leave the parched clearing, the well-defined shadows of the palms, banyan trees, and trailing creepers become apparent again. The illuminated fête which is being held in the town is just now at its height; all the open temples, even the smallest ones, scarcely larger than a cupboard, are adorned with lighted lamps and yellow garlands. As we hasten towards Chri Ragam our carriage passes rapidly through many scenes which fade into one confused recollection. It happens that this is also the month of Ramadan, so the Mohammedans are keeping their festival too. The great mosque, before which surges a crowd of turbans of all colours, is covered by lines of fire, and in order to make their spectacle yet more fairy-like, the white walls, columns, arabesques, and illuminations have been draped with a veil of red muslin which hides the sharp outlines with a rosy glow, and casts a haze of distance and uncertainty over the building; the minarets and the dome, however, are not sheathed in coloured draperies, and shoot up

boldly towards the starry sky, where their snowy crescent-crowned forms glimmer in the moonlight.

## III

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE PROCESSION

The night has fallen as I get back to Chri Ragam, and the walls of the temple of Vishnu are plunged in gloom. I am standing in the sacred precincts where Brahmins alone may dwell, in the large avenue encircling the sanctuary. The car of the god is stationed here, waiting for the moonlight; it is covered by a sort of dais or fantastic pavilion which sparkles with red, green, and yellow gold, and its roof is much ornamented with miniature towers like those of the temple; the car itself, which forms the base of all this, is a huge and terrible mass of sculptured beams, old as the Brahmin faith, of such dimensions that it seems impossible that it could ever be put in motion. The gilt superstructure, resembling an extravagant and shining pavilion, has only been placed there to-day, and is a thing of no weight, made from silk, tinsel, and paper stretched over a bamboo framework, which, however, gives the impression of heightened effect and magnificence. The moon illumines white groups of men surrounding the car, Indians looking like phantoms in the white muslins with which their heads and chests are swathed. But it seems that the moonlight does not suffice, for torches are brought in order that the wheels, which allow the car to move like a monstrous tortoise, may be attached; these car wheels are solid discs some three feet high made from two layers of timber placed side by side and fastened together with iron bolts. The ropes to which three or four hundred frenzied men will harness themselves to-morrow, ropes, thick as a Brahmin's leg, that serve to draw the huge machine, are already being laid out on the ground.

At present the great stone temple is empty and

shrouded in the gloom of night, and my footsteps echo through the silence in an almost terrifying manner. A few Brahmins, who have come from the country for the festival, have sought shelter here, and wrapped in their muslins lie stretched out on the stones like dead men. The few dim lamps hung at long distances apart and the occasional moonbeams make this forest of columns, and its people of idols, seem more boundless than ever.

The avenue along which the car will travel to-morrow at daybreak follows the four sides of the sullen-crested rampart of the sanctuary, sweeping in a bold, straight line between the fortress wall and the old houses of the Brahmins, with their complicated columns, verandas, and terraces guarded by granite monsters; it is very gay, for scarcely any one will sleep to-night, and many white groups, whose outlines are sharply defined in the ghostly moonlight, are to be seen wandering along it.

Women and young girls of high caste commence to leave their houses and gather at the thresholds of the doors, where they begin to decorate the venerable earth that the car of Vishnu will plough into deep ruts when the morning comes. The night is beautifully clear, and everything is plain as in the daylight. These women and young girls are so laden with collars of jasmine, and so many garlands of threaded flowers hang on their bosoms, that as they move it is like a swinging of censers.

There is one young and slender girl, wrapped in black and silver muslin, so beautiful that I stop almost involuntarily before her. Each time that she stoops to the ground, and each time that she raises herself up, the click of the precious rings that surround her ankles and arms is heard. The design that she traces on the ground, and which she seems to invent as she goes on, is of a charming oddity. The guide who accompanies me this evening is a Vellana of noble race, and he, at my suggestion, ventures to ask her if she would lend me the white

powder for a while so that I may assist in decorating the soil in front of her dwelling. She smiles, and after some hesitation hands the little box to him, so that he may give it to me, for she is too disdainful even to touch my hand. The white ghosts wandering along the avenue surround me, puzzled to know what I am going to do, anxious to know what design will spring up under my hands.

As I trace the monogram of Vishnu very clearly on the dull, red soil, a murmur of surprise and sympathy rises from the bystanders. The little Indian beauty even consents to take the sand-box from my hands and to consult with me as to her plans; there will be a border of rose ornaments and stars, and hibiscus flowers are to be placed in the centre of each panel.

I feel, however, that I have trespassed far enough, if not too far, and in order that she may not think me an intruder, and that I may receive a gentle smile of farewell, feel that the precise moment has come for me to withdraw.

Some mysterious rite that I may not see is about to be consummated. It is almost midnight. All the white groups have assembled round the gilded car of the god with the shining canopy. To give more pomp and solemnity to the occasion, the great sacred elephants, one of which is a hundred years old, have been tethered close to the car, and, clothed in their gold-fringed robes of state, shuffle about in the moonlight like flabby monsters. Huge parasols terminating in copper balls have been opened, and now a procession of young Brahmins advances carrying torches, whose triple flames are supported on three branches after the manner of the fork of Vishnu:

This is the hour for the accomplishment of the mysterious rite. From a hidden recess at the back of the temple the most sacred symbol, the true and only image of Vishnu, "the one who may not be looked upon," the god of pure gold reclining on a five-headed serpent, will be taken and carried on

to the platform which stands in an old kiosk built specially for the purpose. Priests with lighted lamps will watch at his feet, and then to-morrow morning they have only to pass the god into the car through a window and to seat him under the dais-shaped tower that guards him from all prying eyes. Each time that the Vishnu of Chri Ragam passes along the avenue on his way to the kiosk, he is, it is needless to say, swathed in many draperies; and even then the removal always takes place at night, so that no uninitiated eye may catch a glimpse of his form. It happens this year that the festival takes place during the period of the full moon, and I, the only profane stranger here, am warned that I ought to retire, for it is really very light. So I retire from the avenue. I take up my quarters in the distant temple with the Brahmins already reposing there, and wait for the coming dawn. The gloomy place is filled with an immense and peaceful calm, and a feeling almost akin to freshness hovers in the air. As I fall asleep I hear murmured prayers, whose faint whispers echo amongst the vaulted arches; sometimes also the muffled tread of naked feet wandering cautiously over the pavement.

## IV

## THE PROCESSION PASSES

Croak! Croak! A crow awakens me with the hoarse cry with which it salutes the dawning day, and gives the signal to its fellows sleeping by thousands in the vicinity. The resonance of this forest of stone prolongs and magnifies the sounds of the mournful concert sung amongst these vaulted arches, for the crows are in some manner sacred and nest in the temple itself. Undying echoes repeat "Croak, croak" from all sides; echoes hovering amidst far-distant granite passages, fading amongst lofty naves or reverberating through underground passages, whose mazes can be felt rather than seen. The entire

temple vibrates with the answering cries of this serenade offered every morning to the many gods who live among these sacred shades.

It is necessary to have the eyes of a bird to perceive that day must soon dawn, and it is darker than it was last night. The lamps have gone out and the moon no longer shines. A dampness as of a tomb is spread over the stones, filling one with a sense of chilliness. Nothing is visible, only here and there the faint glimmer of light which filters through a vent or enters by a hole in the roof. Now another sound is added to the cries of the birds, a noise of wings and a rustling of feathers; the black swarm is about to fly.

Ah! at last the light comes. In this land it always comes quickly, just as it goes. . . . So quickly, that the effect is theatrical; prodigious perspectives of columns stand out suddenly in diaphanous pallor, a pallor so faint as to make them resemble reflections from more distant objects, illusionary and impalpable images of pillars seen through a veil of grayish gauze. Vast points of view are suddenly revealed, crossways of naves whose ends cannot be discerned. Now, behind me, appears the avenue where I met the priest last evening, the avenue of the prancing monsters, whose outlines I can already see. The human shapes which were extended on the ground, swathed in their muslins, rise and stretch their arms, and straightening their backs take their departure, wan and transparent figures, the sound of whose footsteps seems strange in this scene of colourless enchantment.

Near to the flagstone on which I slept last night, a granite staircase leads to the terraces of the temple; gropingly I find my way to it by keeping my hands close to the cold walls.

I ascend, and on reaching the top find myself alone.

The terraces which surmount the flat and massive vaulted arches extend like a desert; a desert of huge paved stones, that lies round me on all sides; a desert which appears to merge into the far-distant

clouds. Here, too, I am possessed with a sense of illusion, but the lighting of the scene is quite different ; it is clearer, though the day has not yet come, and yet, just as in the temple, all the objects that I begin to discern seem unreal. These clouds extending round the terrace are formed of vapour that has condensed on the earth during the night ; a vapour so thick that it resembles a bluish-coloured wadding that might be touched if one were near enough ; the whole plain is filled with its fleecy masses, and only a few tufts of the black feathers and black fans that spring from the heads of the tallest palms emerge from it. A greenish light of a deliciously transparent shade of beryl gradually covers the eastern horizon, looking like a transparent patch of oil which expands in a wide circle over the veil that night has cast over the sky. A large red globe still lingers in the western sky. Is it some worn-out planet ? or a dead world ? or but the slowly-sinking moon ? By this time all the crows that inhabit the temple are awake, and I can hear the concert of their voices beneath me, and the answering cries that descend from all points of the air, now black with whirling flights of wings.

It takes me ten minutes to walk through the wilderness of stones, across naves, galleries, stairways, and passages, to get back to the avenue running round the building where I was last night, and along which the procession will shortly pass.

The golden god must be in his place—his journey from the temple to the kiosk, and from the kiosk to the car duly accomplished—for when I reach the spot no one is near.

The sacred elephants, divested of their finery, are reposing in stalls, which are on a granite balcony extending from either side of the door. The terrible seal of Vishnu painted on their huge foreheads, the same mark that the men have on their own, but ten times greater. Their intelligent eyes are fixed on the car lying near them, which they are so soon to follow.



It is almost day, and the sun must soon rise. The four monstrous wheels are fitted to the car, and the cables lie extended on the ground. Now the high priests descend from the kiosk, where they had passed the night in prayer ; they are preceded by the procession of youths who carry triple-flamed torches, which they extinguish on coming into the brightness of the growing day. The venerable old men appear separately at the top of the black staircase, at first distantly and surrounded by the smoke of the pine torches, but as they gradually descend the steps their wondrous mystic faces, surrounded with white hair, become defined in the fresh morning light, and I see that their foreheads are shaved up to the crown of their heads, in order that the forked seal of their god may be painted in larger characters. They are almost nude—in their forgetfulness of earthly things ; a loin cloth surrounds their body, and they wear a little linen cord indicating their rank, which nestles amidst the fleece of white hair growing on their chests.

Now men are removing the foot-bridge, draped with strange old silks, that led from the car to the window of the kiosk, and which served for the transport of the golden Vishnu. An orchestra of dark-faced musicians plays something deafening, something melancholy and barbarous enough to make one shudder ; some beat the tom-toms, while others blow with all their force into gigantic horns that are turned towards the invisible god.

The decoration of the car is at last completed. Four wooden horses, to give the resemblance of a quadriga, have been yoked in front of it ; horses with outstretched wings and feet that rear themselves into the air with a look of fury. Around the throne of the god, now concealed by impenetrable curtains of red silk, a kind of suspended garden has been made with branches of natural flowers, whose yellow carnations and marigolds are mingled with golden thread. Naked youths, at first concealed amongst

the draperies and the canopies of silk and flowers, are seen stationed at various heights on the rolling structure; these are the guards of honour of the god, and their horns now answer the melancholy howlings that issue from the orchestra stationed on the ground.

The sacred elephants advance towards the car and kneel down of their own will so that the embroidered robes and head ornaments of gold and pearl may be put on them; then they proceed to place themselves behind the priests in the still stationary procession. Meanwhile the younger men fall into rank towards the front of the car, by the side of the four monstrous cables that lie stretched out on the ground.

The wall of the temple which forms one of the sides of the avenue remains dark, deserted, and mournful, but, on the other side, a watching crowd gathers before the houses of the Brahmins, and all the windows, the verandas with their heavy columns, and the pavements, ornamented with monsters, are thronged with children and old men. There are crowds of women everywhere in their gold-embroidered muslins, necklets of flowers, and sparkling jewels; some carry offerings to the priests, whilst others hasten with little sand-boxes in their hands to repair the ravages that have been made in their work, and to place a few fresh, yellow flowers here and there.

The mists that night had thrown over the plain have vanished and melted away, in a single instant, like unsubstantial dreams.

Day dawn in tropical countries is not favourable to any attempts at human pageantry. The spectacle that seemed enchanted but a short while ago when I was on the terraces and whilst the last torches were flaming in the hesitating dawn, now seems unable to bear the pure clearness of the morning sky. Yet I can tell nothing of the sky save that it is infinitely limpid and adorably green, of a pale, resplendent green that cannot be named. But by the

side of it everything looks miserable and faded. The temple wall displays its decay and its mouldering red patches. Too much is visible ; the aid of night or the dazzling brightness of the sun is wanted. The ornamentation of the car is coarse and childish, and the robes of the elephants worn-out and ragged. The clear bronze colour that spreads over the faces and bosoms of the young women resists a little longer, it is true, but there are draperies and muslins which almost look like filthy rags. In this deceptive moment the decrepitude and decadence of Brahmin India seem assured, its rites and festivals appear to have fallen into decay just as its superhuman monuments and its superb race of men. People of a bygone age, and creeds of a past time whose cycle is accomplished and now fall into decay.

However, nothing indicates the oppression of the foreigner ; not a single modern detail intrudes on this ancient spectacle, and I am the only alien present at the festival.

At last the sun comes, the great magician whose appearance will transfigure everything. This sudden bursting forth has something tragic in it, which harmonizes with the temple and with the god whose festival is celebrated to-day. A cloud, close to the horizon, the only visible one, still conceals the sun from those who are on the level ground, a dark copper-coloured sky, three pointed flames, resembling the fork of Vishnu painted on the foreheads of the men. The great towers, however, can see the sun, and the crests of the red granite walls, and the pyramids of gods towering into the air begin to glisten as if surrounded by a halo of glory.

The sacred parrots, who have thousands of nests in this forest of sculpture, commence to stir and utter shrill cries ; their green colour, the green of a Chinese water-colour, looking still more unreal amidst the red entanglement of faces, arms, and legs that grimace and gesticulate on every part of the tall pyramid.

The gildings on the summit of the car commence to

shine now, and the great hour is at hand. The horns give the signal, and hundreds of arms, with tensely knotted muscles, fix themselves on the cables. All the young men, even the most noble Brahmins, join in united effort, partly from pleasure and partly from a sense of duty. Now they make ready. With a grace that is almost feminine, and which contrasts strongly with their proud masculine eyes and thin broad shoulders, they unknot their heavy coils of hair; then raising their arms, which many bracelets encircle, retie them into a tighter knot.

The second signal, a fury of tom-toms, and a more imperious blast of the horn, is answered by an outcry of human tongues, whilst the cables stretch under the effort of straining muscles. However, the enormous machine does not move, for it has become embedded in the ground since last year's procession.

At the instigation of their leader a better organized attempt is made, and this one will no doubt be successful. More men come to help, and old men, whose chests seem covered with snow, mingle their white fleeces with the black ones. A great cry goes up from the crowd, and muscles and backs are strained more furiously than ever. Still it does not move, and the cables fall, like huge dead serpents, from their disheartened hands on to the ground.

But they know well enough that the car will move. Since the memory of man the car of the god has never refused to budge under the efforts of forefathers, whose arms have fallen back to dust so long ago that their souls must either have been reincarnated or freed from fallacious personality and merged into the one universal soul.

The car will move, as the old priests who stand there unconcernedly with dreamy eyes and souls already half loosened from their emaciated bodies know well enough. Even the elephants know it too, for they stand there quite peacefully, though the thoughts which fill their large brains are quite unfathomable to us. The oldest especially must know

it well, the one who has seen three or four generations of arms attached to these ropes, and has been familiar with this scene for the last hundred years.

“Run! fetch the levers and the tackle, we must have them.” Whole trunks of trees are brought on the shoulders of the porters, the levelled end is placed under the wheel which will not move, whilst ten men sit astride on the end that projects into the air and spring up and down, whilst others pull ahead at the ropes and pullies.

The huge structure trembles. There is a great cry of joy, and the car starts off.

The wheels of Vishnu’s car commence to revolve, tearing up the earth with four deep furrows. The car moves, accompanied by the groans of straining axles, a creaking of bending wood, and the din of human voices and sacred trumpets. There is an immense overflow of childish joy; white teeth glimmer in mouths which are opened widely with shouts of triumph, and the air is filled with waving arms.

The car has moved some thirty paces from its original place, but it now stops and becomes embedded again. The elephants who had commenced to walk in procession behind stop also, jostling against one another softly but heavily. So everything must be recommenced.

However, this seems to be the natural order of things, and they prepare to start anew. Whilst the levers and other tackle are being brought, women rush between the serried ranks of priests and almost under the feet of the gentle elephants, so that they may kiss the freshly made furrows in the soil, the ruts dug by the weight of the golden god. The sun’s rays have sunk from the summit of the temple on the crowds assembled below and now clothe them with magnificence. Metal rings shine on all the naked arms, and diamonds and rubies threaded on pins sparkle in the noses of the women. Through the transparence of painted or gold-laced muslin, the bosoms of young

girls are seen stainless as the breasts of the Bride of Siva, the goddess with the eyes of fishes.

The huge machine proceeds jerkily along; sometimes it makes terrible bounds, then come the never-ending stoppages; thus the procession lasts for two or three hours, in a veritable revelry of strength and movement. The tracks left by the procession of the gods make the ground look as if it had been worked by an army of savage ploughs, the same ground that was so smooth this morning and so garlanded with white ribbons and dotted flowers.

As the procession makes a long halt at one of the corners of the temple, where it is necessary to lever the car round the bend of the avenue, I mount again, with my guide and a Brahmin, to the terraces that extend over the labyrinth of naves—the dim passages and the halls with their myriad columns—in order that I may find a little air and quiet. The terraces are as deserted as they were this morning, but the sunlight shows me that they are decayed and ruined, and that their grayish-red walls are riven by cracks, which look like impresses that centuries have left. The hour is still early enough, and the sun sufficiently low for me to sit or even to lie down in the long shadows cast by the monstrous towers.

The terrace extends before me like a solitary and dismal steppe; close by its edge there are some tiny old gods with bats' wings who bend over to look down below; there is nothing else, only this flat plain with its towers of stony-faced gods rising at regular intervals; but the sanctuary is so vast that some of these towers are quite distant.

Here and there deep ruts like trenches are seen; these are the mouths, the openings of the open-air promenades that have been contrived amongst the gloomy halls below; the one in the centre is planted with banyan trees, whose green heads appear above the terrace, and this is the one that surrounds the holy of holies, the secret and dreadful place of gloom where the unapproachable idols repose.

Perhaps the little divinities who look over the crest of the wall are interested in the procession which I can no longer see nor hear from where I am ; all the turmoil below is hidden from me, so also is the neighbouring town with its houses and its streets, and my strange desert seems to border directly on the forest of palms whose bluish outlines are visible against the horizon.

Crows and vultures wheel around in a dazzling sky, traversed from time to time by flights of green parrots. Lizards crawl about, and the hopping squirrels which haunt the monuments and trees of India play and chase one another amongst the holy stones. I fall into a contemplative silence, and there is nothing to make me uneasy but the pyramids of gods that rise into the air above my head ; the attitude of the graven figures is calm and impassive, but the images seem too grotesque, and the towers are too lofty for my European notions.

An hour has flown whilst I have been resting in the shade of this airy wilderness. My guide and the Brahmin are asleep too, lying comfortably at full length on the warm stones.

Can it be that some hallucination has seized me, or is it giddiness ? One of the towers down there seems to totter, and now it actually moves. For an instant I am stupefied, then I look again and understand ; ah ! it is the mock tower of the car, it is the procession trailing along by the side of the temple wall farthest from me. From where I am the taut ropes, the excited crowd, the elephants, and the procession are all hidden as in a ditch, and I can only see the counterfeit structure covering the throne upon which the invisible god is seated. Neither the music nor the cries of the people are audible. This is the last impression the car of Vishnu leaves on me, that of a tower moving by itself along the edge of the terraces, silently and solitarily, in the wilderness of stone.

## V

## AMONG THE BRAHMINS AT MADURA

At Madura, the town which was once the capital of a splendour-loving king, there is a temple dedicated to Siva, and to Parvati his wife, the goddess with the eyes of a fish<sup>1</sup>—a temple that is larger than the Louvre and much more elaborately sculptured, and which contains perhaps as many marvels.

Thanks to the influence of the gracious Maharajah of Travancore, I shall be able to enter this sanctuary, descend to its underground caverns, and see the treasures and head-dresses of the goddess. Though the town retains all its Indian features, strangers, who come here in large numbers, are well received, and the temples are not so sullenly guarded as in some of the neighbouring states.

At Travancore letters of introduction have also been given me to families of various castes living at Madura. I first visit the Brahmins, who in India represent all that is most distinguished and select.

This massive and clumsy house, which contains a ground floor and a single story, is typical of all dwellings of the aristocracy of this town. There is also a veranda with columns, whose capitals are carved into the likeness of monsters' heads, and a little stone staircase leading to the chamber of honour, situated on the first floor and overlooking the street with its three tiny festooned windows. The head of the family, a white-haired old man, receives me there; he is surrounded by four young men, who, it seems, are his sons. Their long eyes are underlined by strokes of black paint; as to clothes, they merely wear a scrap of cloth round their waists, but this does not prevent them from having an air of distinction, nobility, and grace. The room, whitewashed and beautifully clean, has a certain air of elegance, and is perfumed by the scent of some unfamiliar incense

<sup>1</sup> In Indian *Munakshi*.



that has been burnt there. The chairs are of carved ebony. On the walls, in gilt frames, there are some old water-colours representing the seven incarnations of Vishnu. On the floor a beautiful Indian carpet and some mattresses covered with a flowered material. The Brahmins are a little surprised at my visit, for strangers do not generally call; nevertheless, they seem anxious to be courteous and hospitable, and invite me to inspect their house. First there is a melancholy courtyard surrounded by walls, on which sheep and goats are lying under the shade of a stunted banyan tree. Then we visit the roofs, whose terraces are the homes of pigeons and the resting-places of countless crows. From here we overlook the palace of the ancient kings of Madura, an enormous and costly monument of the seventeenth century, built in the Hindoo-Arabian style; the town, with its temples and its huge red pyramids of gods towering from all sides into a sky black with birds, lies farther off and stretches out till it joins the distant forest of palms. Finally, I am taken to the library, which is crammed with books of philosophy and religion; all these volumes indicate a highly-advanced and special culture which contrasts strongly with the simple garb of my hosts.

Before going I return to the reception-room and rest there a few moments, whilst one of the young men takes a long gilt mandoline and plays softly on its muted strings. Of course I have not seen the women, that would not have been proper, but before I take leave the two youngest children of the house are brought to me, two little girls of three to four years who advance towards me without any traces of fear. Their costume consists of little heart-shaped plaques of gold, which are suspended from a little chain that is attached round their waists, and some heavily chiselled rings that adorn their wrists and ankles.

They are two little marvels of beauty, two charming bodies of bronze, and with eyes of night in whose depths a smile seems to lurk under their long painted lashes.





## VI

## BALAMONI, THE GOOD BAYADÈRE

A bayadère, celebrated as much for her charity as for her grace, lives at Madura. In accordance with the usual custom she was at first the favourite of a Nabob, who at his death left her covered with as many precious stones as an idol. Rich and free now, she spends her fortune in works of art and deeds of charity, and in the theatre which she has had specially built, revives with her own charming art classic Indian tragedies that are thousands of years older than our own.

I wander under the splendour of the full moon on my way to the theatre of Balamoni, the good bayadère, and as I pass through the palm woods the long black feathers hanging down in all directions from their slender stems sway and brush softly against each other in the gentle breeze.

Balamoni is on the stage when I reach my seat ; she is at the back in a garden of painted flowers, in the golden tower of a fairy palace where she is held captive, and she sings from her windows, accompanying herself on a precious mandoline.

She is a young princess betrothed to the son of a king of one of the neighbouring countries, and her affianced is coming to seek her shortly. At the very first notes one feels the charm of the music and of her voice. Her costume is copied from an antique bas-relief and her outline is charming. At each gesture of the singer the diamonds and rubies with which she is covered glitter.

The rest of the scenery is of an artlessness that is doubtless unintentional, but even whilst making me smile, it gives the impression of an exotic and distant land. The hall is very large and can hold over a thousand persons, though it is simply like one of those light structures of wood, matting, and bamboo that people erect by the side of the temples at the time of

the great religious festivals. It has no decoration of any sort, but on each side of the stage there are boxes for the princesses of the ancient reigning family ; the princesses, however, are not coming this evening, for it is not their day. The whole of the pit and other seats are filled by naked-breasted spectators, for the temperature is that of a hot-house filled with scented flowers.

Balamoni sings in a tongue that has long since vanished—in the Sanskrit, which is the mother of our Indo-European languages, and the entire piece will be played in this language just as it was written formerly in the first dawn of time ; but all the listeners excepting myself are sufficiently educated to understand it. The story runs something in this wise. The young princess, whose part the bayadère acts to-night, is loved by seven young princes at the same time, and all these princes are brothers. In order that they may not cause any suffering to each other, they have sworn amongst themselves that none of them should ever wed her, not even the one who was chosen to be her husband by his father the king, the one who was coming to seek her in the palace in which she was kept. In the beginning they are all happy, contenting themselves with her friendship and her smiles. But one day, whilst hunting in a wood, evil spirits, who had assumed the form of white-haired fakirs, came to tempt each one separately and to set them against each other by false statements. Then hatred and unhappiness entered into the palace with a thousand plans of violence and crime. However, the good spirits intervened in their turn, before any wrong had been committed, and after a fearful struggle regained possession of the princes' souls. Once more the princes found calm and peace with their adopted sister, and enjoyed perfect happiness in the fulfilment of their duty. During one of the *entr'actes*, I went to the box of Balamoni, who had been told of my intended visit, in order to thank her for being so beautiful, and for having played the

young girl's part with gestures so pure and simple. I found her in a plain little room carpeted with matting, in which the diamonds and ornaments that were strewn about seemed as much out of place as the fantastic presents that some gnom might have left in the hut of a shepherdess.

As I reached the door waiting-men, in accordance with the usual custom, place a thick collar of natural flowers, interwoven with gold thread, round my neck, and the hostess offered me her hand with an easy and assured grace. Her proposal, she informed me, was to revive the whole of the ancient Sanskrit plays, and she professed herself much flattered when I mentioned that I would speak of her to my friends in France.

I met the bayadère again next morning in a place that had no romance attached to it; it was at the station of the Madras Railway, for, alas! the railway runs through Madura. She was accompanied by two servants and was going by train to visit her property in the country, just as any modest and prudent housewife might have done. Truly, in the midst of the rather shabbily attired Indian crowd she seemed to have the air of a *peri* who had wandered from her way. From afar she could be seen shining like a star, for there were diamonds in her ears, diamonds on her neck and bosom, and her beautiful bare arms were covered with diamonds from the wrists to the shoulders. Others of a wondrous limpidity were attached to the septum of her little quivering nose, drooped over her mouth. Between her yellow waist-band and the short corset of lilac-coloured silk, a portion of her body, smooth as a fair column of metal, and part of the beautiful breasts, whose outlines were modestly concealed by folds of muslin, were exposed to view. (In evening dress our women expose the upper part of the bosom, and I cannot see that it is more improper to show the lower part, it lends itself less to artificial imposition, that is all.)

The bayadère comported herself with so much reserve and dignity, indeed, that I saluted her, just as I

would have done any lady of position. She answered my greeting in the Indian manner, touching her forehead with two ruby-covered hands ; then, accompanied by her maids, took her seat in the carriage "For ladies only."

I follow the good Balamoni with my eyes as I leave the horrible neighbourhood of the station and make my way to the temple of the goddess. During the course of the day some of her kindly deeds were related to me. This one amongst others : last month some European ladies who were collecting money for a Hindoo orphanage came to her, upon which Balamoni, with her beautiful smile, handed them a note for a thousand rupees (about eighty pounds). She is charitable to all, and the poor know the road to her house well enough.

J

## VII

## THE TEMPLE

In the temples of India twilight always comes on long before its usual time, under the shadow of low roofs, that are heavy and oppressive as those of sepulchres. The evening sun is still shining in the west, but the little lamps placed at the approach of the temple of Madura, and along the granite-covered avenue that forms a sort of prefatory vestibule where garland sellers are stationed, are already lighted. Any one coming from outside, as I do, sees everything mingled in universal gloom ; men, idols, monsters, human faces and great stone faces, rigid gestures of statues who have too many arms, and the real motions of men who have but two. The sacred cattle, after wandering through the streets all day, have come here too, to nibble flowers and reeds before retiring to sleep in the temple.

After the avenue, there is a door like a tunnel that pierces through a huge pyramid of gods that towers into the sky. Then we reach the temple itself, a

silent and echoing city, whose vaulted streets cross one another in all directions, and whose countless people are the stone images graven here. Each column and each monstrous pillar is made of a single block, placed upright by means unknown to us—perhaps by the united strength of millions of snows—and afterwards deeply sculptured, carved with images of all sorts of gods and monsters. The ceilings are entirely flat, and at the first glance it is difficult to see how they are supported; then we notice that they are composed of single blocks of stone eight to ten metres long, resting on their two extremities, and that an infinite number of these blocks have been placed side by side, just as ordinary planks are placed with us. The whole structure is built somewhat in the manner of those almost everlasting edifices of Thebes or Memphis over which time has no control. Just as at Chri Ragam, there are serried ranks of prancing horses, that beat the air with their fore feet, and rows of gods that die away into the dimmest distance in lines of fading perspective. The antiquity of the columns is only to be divined from the worn surfaces near their base, or from the blackish polish that covers everything within reach of bodies or hands; a polish that only the constant and daily contact of animals and men can give. Magnificence and filth, a combination of Titanic luxury and barbaric negligence. Garlands, reeds, and leafy branches of banyan, that have been suspended from one column to the other to celebrate some festival, now lie on the ground in putrefying masses; properties belonging to the processions, fantastic animals, white elephants of natural size made from paper or paste-board, lie crumbling and rotting in the corners. Sacred cattle and real elephants wander freely through the naves and drop their dung on the greasy and slippery pavements that their feet have polished. Great vampire bats swarm amongst the lofty vaults, but their black wings sweep so noiselessly among the roofs that no sound is heard.



From an inner court that is open to the sky, I catch a glimpse of the fading evening light. It is unoccupied, but some peacocks are perched with outspread tails on the granite monsters. Above the surrounding walls those red and green towers, those surprising pyramids of gods, are visible at varied distances ; half-way up amidst the divinities, swallows and parrots flutter round their nests ; but nearer the bristling points of the summit, still shimmering in the sun, crows and eagles are wheeling madly through the air.

Outside this courtyard, and in a more concealed part of the sanctuary, I chance upon the priest to whom I was specially recommended, the one who can show me the adornments of the goddess.

It seems that I cannot see them to-morrow, for to-morrow is a day of high religious festival. Just as the Vishnu of Chri Ragam makes the yearly round of his temple in a car, so the Siva and Parvatî of Madura make an annual excursion by boat in a great lake that has been hollowed out for them ; and this happens to be the evening before the day appointed for the sacred promenade.

But, on the day after to-morrow, so soon as it is light in the temple, the doors of the secret vaults shall be thrown open, and the treasures displayed before me.

## VIII

### THE BOAT OF SIVA

Need I mention that the boat is a huge and extravagant thing, though it is but temporary, and a new one is built each year ? Upon a hull suited to a three-decked ship, a sort of fairy palace is made from bamboo framework covered with silk or gilt paper ; then there are towers like those of the temples, paper horses and elephants, and the whole surface is covered by waving streamers. All the same our European eyes are fascinated by the extreme strangeness, and

the archaic and Eastern imagery with which it is decorated.

It is two o'clock in the afternoon, and a burning sun pours its fires upon the lake and its deserted banks. The boat is waiting there, moored to a granite stairway, new and resplendent in the midst of the old and unchanging scene. Though this is the hour fixed for the embarkment of Siva, no one comes and nothing even stirs.

The lake on which the boat rests has been dug out by human hands, and is a square some six to eight hundred metres across; granite staircases line its four sides and allow the faithful to descend to its holy waters; in the middle of the lake is a square island that has towers at each of its corners; whilst in the middle of the island an entirely white pagoda stands in a garden of banyan trees. The banks present large open spaces where crowds may congregate, but now these shores are overwhelmed by light and heat; in the vicinity there are curtains of verdure, banyans, palm trees, and some temples; but they are quite distant from the temple of the goddess, and almost in the country.

I hear the sound of approaching tom-toms; the procession is coming. Soon it issues from a shady avenue and advances into the sunlight, into the small burning desert where the lake and the strange ship slumber.

Cardboard giants, some ten or fifteen feet high, that roll and totter on the shoulders of their bearers, come first, followed by artificial elephants carried on men's backs; then six real elephants clothed in long red robes entirely covered with spangles, and a score of huge red parasols of the ancient Asiatic form that was fashionable in the processions of Babylon or Nineveh. Next come the tom-toms and the screeching bagpipes; and lastly the great gilt palanquins of Siva and the gods of his race.

No crowd follows; the procession is quite unaccompanied, and it does not seem to have aroused any

interest on its way through Madura. Slowly it makes the round of the lake, under the ever-burning rays of the sun, and at last stops before the boat ; but no curious eye has even come to look.

They next go through the ceremony of embarkation, which takes place in the following order : the two sons of Siva, Siva himself, and lastly Parvati his wife. Some ancient boatmen, who doubtless have been attached to this service for many years, advance from the lake, the water dripping from their hairy bodies as they approach the palanquins. How different this is from the placing of Vishnu in his car, that ceremony so mysteriously accomplished at Chri Ragam during the night when the god was hidden by so many veils. I remain quite close, and no one troubles about me or even requests me to retire. The curtains of the palanquins are wide open, and perhaps on this occasion I may see the idols that have been worshipped and dreaded for so many centuries.

Oh ! how can I express the surprise and the feeling of horror that they gave me as they passed close by, supported on magnificent cushions, carried on the wrinkled arms of old and naked servitors. Evil-looking little dolls that seemed flexible and boneless, and whose necks had sunk between their shoulders under the weight of their jewelled tiaras. Little rose-coloured faces of the size of an orange (why rose when the Indian race is bronze-coloured ?), thin lips and closed eyes that had no lashes, they might well be styled human embryos, still-born abortions that retained a fierce expression even in their eternal sleep. Yet in spite of their sullen look they have an air of repletion, an almost drunken weariness in the midst of the profusion of necklaces, diamonds, rubies, and wreaths of fine pearls with which their miserable bodies are loaded. Great golden ears loaded with precious rings are hung on each side of their heads, and false hands of gold, that are much too large, with long nails, are attached to their hands, whilst large golden feet dangle from their legs.

A tiny hand, which looks like that of a foetus or of a monkey, has escaped from its huge golden gauntlet and lies there a crumpled mass of the same rosy colour as the idol's face.

The orchestra of tom-toms and bagpipes plays with frenzied fury as the hairy boatmen carry off these ancient still-born children, wrapped in glittering brocades and jewels that gleam in the dazzling sunlight. Now they seat them on thrones that are placed at the bottom of the boat, where they remain invisible enshrouded by thick curtains.

It is all over now. The procession, the elephants, and the parasols vanish, and once more the banks of the lake are deserted. The fantastic boat waits for the evening, then, when the moonlight shines, its wanderings will begin.

Night has come once more, and this old Hindoostan finds peace; its glaring lights and mad excesses of brilliancy and colour are now swathed in shade. Now, too, the moonbeams penetrate the pall of bluish darkness that has settled on the earth and irradiate everything with their soft and silvery light. Crowds of the faithful hasten to kindle rows of wicks dipped in oil that have been placed along the three tiers of descending steps which extend around the lake; and soon the immense extent of the square pond is outlined by a triple line of fire. The pagoda on the island in the centre is illuminated also, delineated in lines of palms, though it still remains white in the gleaming moonlight.

The crowd has been assembling since sunset. All the leafy avenues of tangled banyan trees, which lead here from the country and the town, pour forth their floods of humanity on to the shores of the sacred lake. Thousands and thousands of heads are now gathered by the banks, like pebbles on a shore, to pay honour to Siva; dark and delicate Indian heads that are smaller than those of Europeans, and which seem to find room for feelings of the most ardent mysticism and the most glowing sensuality. (These two things

are often associated, though, alas! the recognition of the fact may well fill us with dismay.)

Each one who comes to the lake of Siva carries a long reed, still decked with leaves, across his shoulders, so that the multitude almost looks like a field of grain. The elephants of the great temple, that have been brought back at nightfall, now look like rocks or islands scattered in the midst of this moving plain of vegetation, from which the dark outlines of Hindoo heads sometimes protrude.

Near the fantastic boat, that floating palace with its gilt towers on which Bengal fires constantly burn, an agitated crowd is seen. To the sound of music the towing ropes are brought forward and laid along the ground, then, with shouts of joy, hundreds of the faithful seize them with convulsive grasp. Those who cannot take place by the tightly-stretched rope plunge into the lake bespattering everything; with water up to their waists they push the boat from behind or draw it by its side, or at least walk in its wake.

The noise increases, and the tom-toms and the bag-pipes play furiously; the boat has started and now moves smoothly past the granite edges of the lake. The god and the goddess have begun their oft-repeated journey under a moon that seems to shine with more than usual splendour. The gentle elephants covered with tinkling bells follow along the banks with hesitating steps, fearful lest they tread upon some child or injure the crowds so closely thronged about them.

## IX

### THE TREASURES OF THE GODDESS WITH THE FISH'S EYES

I went to the temple this morning, immediately the sun rose, in order to see the treasures of the goddess. The inclosure contains two sanctuaries. The larger is dedicated to Siva, under the name of Sundareshvar

(the blessed one). The other on the right, opposite the Patramaral (the pond of the golden lily), is dedicated to his wife Parvati, who is also named Minakehi (the goddess with the fish's eyes).

An animated throng already surrounds the labyrinth of stone, and all the niches between the dreadful statues and the granite stalls are occupied by flower sellers, who weave garlands of marigolds, Bengal roses, and gold thread. A continuous stream of half-clothed men passes by, their hair still dripping with water from the morning ablution, and their eyes yet lost in the land of prayer and dreams. The sacred elephants and cattle that dwell in the dusky naves, the birds of the sky that nest in the towers or amongst the red pyramids, all tremble with joy and life in the fresh morning air, and their cries, bellowings, and songs are heard in all directions.

I find the priests awaiting at the appointed place to conduct me to the hidden recesses.

A heavy copper door that leads to the secret part of the temple is thrown open, then after traversing a nave bordered with black gods that loom out of a cavern-like darkness, I find myself in the midst of a pure light by the pond that is named "the pond of the golden lily." It is a deep square of water open to the sky, and its sides are surrounded by granite steps which lead down to the water. Exquisite colonnades, supporting a roof that is sculptured and painted in a grave, formal manner, run round the four sides and form a cloister in which Brahmins can walk and meditate. One side of the jealously guarded inclosure is still bathed in a half light that is fresh and blue, whilst the other is illuminated in tones of rose-red by the morning sun. Above the cloisters that surround the lake with an unbroken line, the towers of the temples, those same prodigious red pyramids of gods that tower over everything and that are seen from all sides, shine in the bright firmament at various heights and unequal distances, each surrounded by its wheeling flight of birds. A sparkling

golden cupola is also seen towering into the sky. It is the cupola of the holy of holies, that place of mystery to which no human influence can ever give me access. Oh ! what a strange lake this is, motionless as if enchanted. The columns standing round it are reflected, lengthened, doubled, and reversed in water that is untarnished by a single ripple, in water that seems dead, in a prison of magnificent severity. A nameless peace hovers over this "pond of the golden lily," this mirror of the sun, the clouds, and the stars, that lies hidden in the heart of the immense temples.

I have given up trying to recollect by what ways the priests are leading me amidst the labyrinth of arches. The more we advance, the more monstrous and oppressive our surroundings become. Everything is built of stones, whose mass grows more enormous at every step. Twenty-armed gods, with their huge and varied attitudes, swarm amid the gloom, and I pass by endless rows of them standing in tortured postures. I walk in a dreamland that is peopled by giants and shapes of terror. It is dark around me, and our footsteps wake echoes that seem to issue from a tomb.

The sculptures become more prodigious and everything grows more magnificent, but at the same time all is more filthy and more barbarously uncared-for. To the height of a man the walls and ledges are polished and black with filth and wet. We are in a gallery consecrated to the elephant-headed god Ganesa, whose monstrous form is illuminated from below by several smoky flames that burn close by his trunk and feet. Here, in a loathsome corner that is quite dark, a herd of living creatures, whose breathing is plainly audible, stand amidst monsters whose contorted attitudes are graven out of stone. An idle family of zebu cows, who continue to sleep as though the sun had not risen yet. We slip in the dung with which the stones are covered, but no one dares to throw it out, for all that comes from the cattle is as sacred as the cattle themselves. Above our heads









1. "TROPICAL PATH" by [illegible]



huge bats flutter their widely extended wings in terror and bewilderment.

Once, as we were passing by a high and gloomy nave at the bottom of which I could dimly see some colossal divinities lit up by several lamps, my guide seemed to hasten their footsteps and to be filled with uneasiness. One of the Brahmans who was guiding me turned round and whispered that we had passed the holy of holies, but that he had only told me after we had passed for fear that I might have seen too much. The priests at length halted in a vast and superb spot, a sort of square lying in a forest of massive columns, a place into which several cathedrals seemed to open, for naves led off in every direction, and lost themselves in gloom. We are surrounded on all sides by gigantic gods, hewn from a single block of stone, who brandish lances, swords, and skulls, but their figures are black, shining, and greasy, for they have drunk of the sweat of the countless hands that have lingered on them. There are many altars gleaming with objects of copper and silver; many pyramids of bronze that time has almost worn out, but which once held torches and played some mysterious part in the worship of the goddess. In the middle there is a swarming crowd of the nude, long-haired beggars who haunt the vicinity of every temple: the guardians drive and shove them away with many cries, for they throng importunately round a sort of barrier that has been made by attaching two cords from one pillar to another.

A portion of the strained cord is lowered so that I may pass, then raised once more so as to inclose the priests and myself within its circle. In front of me there is a table of great extent covered with a black carpet on which are heaped the treasures of the goddess.

A chair is placed for me near the piles of gold and precious stones, and a garland of marigolds is hung round my neck. Now the priests hand me the ancient jewels they have left their hiding-place for one little

hour ; they beg me to handle them, and find amusement in throwing them, one after the other, on to my knees. There are dozens of golden tiaras, ornamented with stones of many colours, ropes of pearls, and rubies that resemble boa-constrictors.

Bracelets a thousand years old ; ancient neck-pieces so heavy that they can hardly be lifted with one hand. Great urns like those the women carry on their shoulders when they go to draw water from the well, but these are hammered and chased out of fine gold. There is a chest ornament, a plate of wondrous blue, made from uncut sapphires large as nuts.

The sound of far-off music reaches me from the back of the temple as these strange riches are poured into my hands ; the growling of tom-toms and the deafening plaint of sacred shells and bagpipes. From time to time there are sounds of strife behind me, the cries of the guardians chasing away the horde of famished beggars, whose thronging threatens the frail barrier of rope. Now they show me stirrups of heavy gold inlaid with diamonds, doubtless used by the goddess when she rides abroad. There are the false ears in gold, with pendants of fine pearls, that they hang on each side of her rose-coloured doll-like face when the procession day arrives. Here, too, the false hands and feet of gold which they fasten to the ends of her half-formed extremities each time that she forsakes the temple's shade to make her solemn wandering.

I believed that all was over when once the treasures, with which the table was so extravagantly laden, were exhausted. But it was not so ; the priests led me through dark galleries, filled with dreadful shapes, to a court in which sounds were heard like those of clear and lively trumpet notes. There, clothed in red robes, the six sacred elephants were standing in the sunlight waving their large transparent ears. On my appearance they at once knelt down, though the fan-like motion of the ears was uninterrupted. Then when I had bestowed on each the silver offering that their small, shrewd eyes

sought for, they rose up and departed with the ambling gait of contented bears. They went haphazard or where they listed, for they have full liberty to wander through all these passages and naves.

The halls through which I am now conducted are built and roofed with enormous blocks, and have the look of cyclopean caverns. Attendants, who accompany us, climb up the walls to draw back the mat blinds that cover air-holes of irregular shape, but it is in vain. It is really so dark that we must have lamps. Naked children run to fetch lamps and torches of an antique form that burn smokily at the extremities of long bronze stalks, or on the ends of supports bent into the form of a horn.

A door covered with iron is thrown open, and our young torch-bearers enter first.

We are in one of the fantastic stables of the goddess. A silver cow and some golden horses of natural size are ranged there, bathed in a perpetual night and a constant damp heat.

Now the children approach the rudely sculptured figures, and the shining gems with which the harness is studded are seen to glitter in the torches' flame. Above our heads, somewhere in the awe-inspiring granite roof, we hear the shrill cries and the constant fluttering of featherless wings made by the crowd of vampires that fly above us in maddened wheelings.

There is a second door cased with iron; another stable for animals of silver and of gold.

A third and last door. Here live a silver lion, a huge golden peacock, with fully expanded tail, whose eyes are made of uncut emeralds, and a golden cow with the face of a woman of supernatural size, who wears jewels in her ears and jewels in the division of her nose in the manner of the Indian women. Golden sedan chairs for the use of the goddess are stabled in the corners; state palanquins, wholly made of gold, wrought with precious carvings and inlaid with flowers of diamonds and rubies.

The naked children cast the light of their curved

handled torches on these fabulous treasures, but as the torches give more smoke than light I can only see a detail here and there, or the glint of a precious stone, and the rest of the cavern is plunged in a sepulchral and oppressive gloom. The walls are covered with spiders' webs and little stalactites, and in places saltpetre and slime ooze out of them. The startled vampires wheel noiselessly round us, and as they flit by we feel as if a tattered dark material had swept past us, and hear a shrill cry like that of a rat caught in a trap.

## X

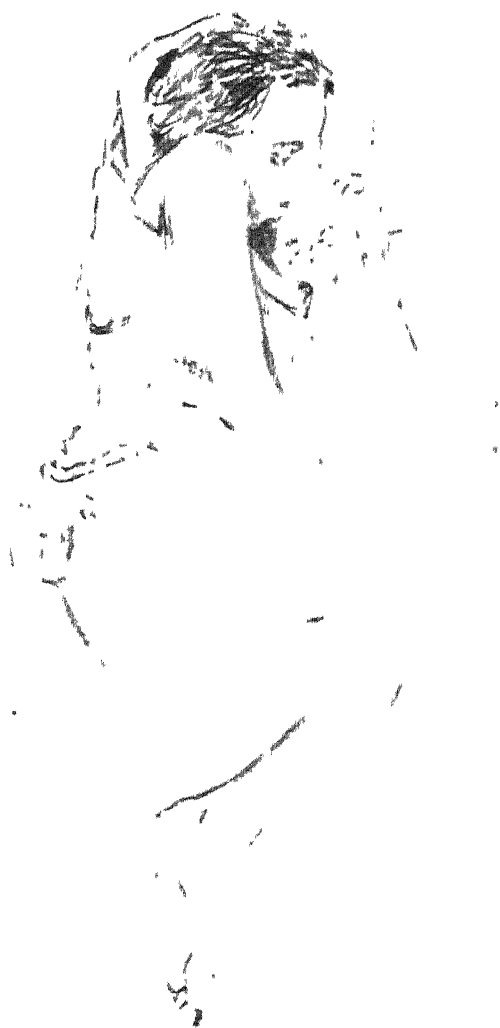
## TOWARDS PONDICHERRY

Leaving the country of Madura in a northerly direction, and ascending towards Pondicherry, we gradually forsake the damp region of the great palms. Their shady clumps are farther apart and give place to fields of grain, plantations, and rice patches. The air gradually becomes less oppressive, but the country is not so well watered and the whole land seems changed.

An air of pastoral tranquillity reigns, though the inhabitants are more sparsely scattered than those of Europe. Troops of goats, and herds of small humped cattle graze on the fast ripening grass that still remains, watched over by naked shepherds, and by shepherdesses wrapped in scarlet cloth.

Each village of mud and thatched house has its Brahmin temple, whose pyramid of gods and whose monsters that lean over the walls crumble away to reddish dust in the burning rays of the terrible sun. At long intervals there are masses of enormous trees, under whose shade gods seated on thrones are ever to be found, guarded by stone horses or cows that have kept watch there for many centuries.

The red dust ; the red dust that hourly assumes a greater mastery. Dryness also becomes more marked,



HINDOO WOMAN AND BABE





and we hasten through regions which are suffering from a drought that is probably exceptional, and where the sky has a fixed blue limpidity that looks eternal.

On all sides husbandmen are labouring at the work of irrigation, which they carry out by means of the ingenious methods of olden times. Men may be seen standing knee-deep in all the streams that surround the rice-fields, each couple holding an extended sheep-skin by the cords which are attached to it; they swing it with an automatic movement that is guided by the refrain they sing, and in turn fill it and empty its contents into a gutter situated at a higher level, from which the water runs among the furrows of rice that still looks fresh and green.

The wells, which are always placed under the trees, are worked in a different manner, and to the accompaniment of a different melody. A bucket is fastened to the end of a very long pole, which is balanced on the top of an upright mast; two men walk erect on this pole, supporting themselves with the graceful agility of gymnasts by clinging to the branches of the neighbouring trees; they take three steps in one direction, and the pole dips towards the well and the bucket fills; three steps in the reverse direction, and the pole rises and the bucket swings in the air; and so they go on, from morning to night, never ceasing to sing.

As we proceed the dryness threatens to become disastrous, and we soon pass the first dead trees. These are burnt up as if by fire, and their leaves are curled up and coated by the red dust which attacks the monuments of the south, but which here casts its blood-coloured stain over the plants themselves. Face to face with this thirsty land and rainless heaven how impotent our little human efforts seem, little buckets of water hauled up one after the other from the bottom of wells whose springs are gradually drying up. Now we begin to understand the reality and to feel the approach of the frightful famine

which before our arrival in India only seemed to us like a pre-historic plague that was quite inexcusable in these days of civilization, when steamboats and railways were at hand to bring food to those who were dying of hunger.

## XI

## AT PONDICHERRY

The woods of coco-nuts and the great palms re-appear as we approach Pondicherry, our tiny and decaying colony. The region around has so far been spared by the drought, and looks like an oasis which the streams and the rain have not ceased to water, and which in some way recalls the beautiful verdure of the south.

Pondicherry ! amongst the names of all the ancient colonies which exercised so great a fascination over my childish mind, those of Pondicherry and Goree were the ones that most readily called up the dreams of strange and foreign lands that ever haunted me. Towards my tenth year, an aged grand-aunt spoke to me one evening of a friend who had lived at Pondicherry, and read me a passage from one of her letters, which even then was half a century old, and in which she spoke of palm trees and pagodas.

Oh ! what feelings of melancholy come over me as I reach the charming and far-distant town, where amidst the mouldering walls an entire chapter of ancient French history slumbers.

There are little streets almost like those that are hidden in our own peaceful provinces, little straight streets bordered by old and low whitewashed houses standing amid the red earth ; garden walls, over which tropical flowers and bindweeds fall ; barred windows behind which pale-faced Creoles or lovely Eurasians, whose eyes gleam with Indian mystery, may be seen. “ Rue Royale,” “ Rue Duplex ”—one can read these names cut in the stone in the ancient

letters of the eighteenth century, just as I remember to have seen them at the street corners of my native town on some of the older houses. "Rue Saint Louis" and "Quay de la Ville Blanche," the word "quay" spelt with a "y."

In the centre of Pondicherry there is a large, overgrown, and deserted square, ornamented in the middle by an elaborate fountain whose age does not, I think, exceed one hundred years, though the glare of the all-devouring sun has made it look much older. Somehow this open space conveys an impression of infinite sadness, though I am quite incapable of saying why.

From the very first, I, who feel myself so much of a stranger in the rest of India, am possessed by a feeling of charm—that olden charm of one's native land which nothing can replace, and that our newer colonies of the extreme East do not yet possess, in that they have had no past.

It is but a tiny little town that exists on its traditions, that lives but because it has lived, systematically isolated from the rest of India by our hostile neighbours, and having neither port nor anchorage on the Gulf of Bengal where our boats can shelter. Electricity and smoking funnels are wanted also, and here are no hurrying throngs as at Madras or Calcutta, and neither strangers nor tourists; for as Pondicherry is not on the direct route, who would be likely to come to see it?

Facing the sea there is a garden where a band plays at sundown, and is the evening resort of a number of pale-faced children; some of them born in France, others in the land of exile. There, amongst beautiful tropical trees, a quantity of columns have been erected around the statue of Dupleix—columns so tall and fine that they resemble ships' masts. These precious monoliths, these reeds of granite, sculptured in Indian style, bear witness to our bygone greatness, for the Maharajah of the country gave them to this same Dupleix in olden

times so that he might embellish the palace of France with them. But, alas ! the palace was never built.

An angry sea, on which no sails are visible, and whose appearance is as hostile and prison-like as that of Travancore, breaks into foaming billows along the shore. An iron pier juts out into the water, permitting communication with the packets that anchor opposite the shore, but which remain for as short a time as possible. Several large boats are lying wrecked along the sands, of themselves proving the insecurity of the coasts, so massive and solid are they, so well fitted for the struggle.

"Pondicherry, the town of palaces," as it is called in India. There are, in fact, several beautiful old dwellings with Greek colonnades near the Government House Buildings, in the midst of gardens which slumber behind lowered mat-blinds, that may well justify this appellation.

In addition to the officers and functionaries of the colony, some Creole families, who came during the heroic epoch, and who, after four or five generations, have become quite acclimatized, are to be found here. I saw ancient dames whose manners were gentle and old-fashioned ; charming old salons, pervaded by a tinge of melancholy, furnished with sofas and chairs of the eighteenth century, and Louis XVI and Empire clocks, all of which must have made the hazardous journey by the Cape of Good Hope, in the days when the passage by Egypt had not been foreseen. How many hours of languid existence, how many minutes of wearied exile, have not these clocks of olden days numbered ? It is foolish, I know, but the clocks of olden days that I see in the colonies always arrest my thoughts.

The native town that clusters by the "white city" is large, animated, and quite Hindoo, with its bazaars, palm trees, and pagodas. But the Indians are French Indians, and hold fast to France, or at least, are pleased to say so.

I cannot say how touched I was at the reception



A HINDOO ACTRESS



accorded me by a certain purely native club that was established by Indian initiative to promote the reading of our books and reviews.

In order to extend further the knowledge of our language a school has been added. Oh ! what adorable little scholars were presented to me. Children of about eight years of age, with refined bronze faces, and such courteous and well-schooled manners. Some are clothed like little rajahs in robes of gold-embroidered velvet, but they can work out problems on the blackboard and do exercises that would perplex the majority of our school children.

## XII

## THE DANCE OF THE BAYADÈRE

The young painted face, with eyes of excessive length, draws near. The young face with the impress of gloom and sensuality advances and draws back, very quickly and very lightly. The two pupils that roll, black as an onyx on a groundwork of white enamel, are fixed on mine unwaveringly, in these alternative advances of sensual appeal, and retreats into the shade, that are ever succeeded by a new and provocative advance. The young, bronze-coloured face is wreathed in precious stones, and a band of gold and diamonds surrounds the forehead and descends over the temples, concealing the hair, and in the ears and nose many diamonds sparkle.

It is night, and everything is lit up, but in all this crowd I can only see the woman with the helmeted head whose shining point seems to exercise a fascination over me. There are many spectators gathered around watching her also, scarcely leaving room for her evolutions, only a sort of passage by which she can reach me and then draw back ; but they have ceased to exist for me, and I only see the woman and her sparkling head-dress and the play of her black eyes and eyebrows. She has a body lithe as a serpent,



yet firm and plump ; enchanting arms that seem instinct with assurances of embrace, and which twist and writhe like snakes loaded and encircled up to the shoulders by diamonds and rubies. But, no ! the attraction lies in those eyes whose expression is ever changing, sometimes mocking, sometimes tender, and which look into mine in a way that makes me tremble. The jewels of her head-dress and the gems in her ears and nose shine so brilliantly, and the golden band forms such a brightly defined framing, that the face underneath, with its soft features and its dull and dusky skin, seems to have a nameless and far-off indefiniteness, even when it is quite close to me. The bayadère goes and comes ; she seems to dance for me alone. Her dance is noiseless, and only the tinkling of the precious bracelets on her ankles is heard, for a carpet receives the cadenced impress of the little naked feet, whose expanded and mobile toes are burdened with rings.

All this takes place in an atmosphere so saturated with essences and the perfume of flowers as to be almost unbreatheable. I am at a fête given by the Indians who live here, the French Indians, and I am in the house of the most wealthy of them. On my arrival the host placed a many-rowed collar of jasmynes of intoxicating odour round my neck, and sprinkled me also with rose-water from a long-necked silver flagon. The heat is suffocating. The guests are mostly seated—a row of dusky heads whose turbans are embroidered with gold thread. Above these heads great fans of painted palm are waved by naked and erect attendants—their nudity looking the more strange amongst this gaily decked crowd, where even the men wear diamonds in their ears and at their waists.

The bayadère has been told that the fête was in my honour, so that it is to me that this comédienne, accomplished both by nature and inheritance, addresses herself.

She has come from afar for this evening, from one

of the temples of the south, where she is in the service of Siva ; her reputation is great, and her performances are costly.

She sways backwards and forwards, waving meanwhile her beautiful nude arms, twisting her fingers into strange shapes, and her toes, which have been trained since her infancy to that purpose, into still stranger contortions, the great toe being always separated and maintained erect in the air.

Between the gauze of gold that envelops her loins and the corset in which her bust is held a close prisoner one sees as usual a little of her pale bronze body, a little of her vigorous and sinewy flesh ; and the play of the lower part of her breasts and of her waist is exposed to our gaze.

Her dance consists of a series of expressive poses, a kind of acted monologue, with those oft-repeated advances and retreats, approaching towards me through the lane of human faces, coming quite close with her eyes riveted on mine ; then, with a sudden flight, disappearing into the gloom that envelops the lower end of the hall.

She depicts a scene of seduction and reproach. Behind, at the back, musicians intone the melody of this scene to an accompaniment of tambourines and flutes. She, too, sings as she acts, but only to herself, and in a little voice that is not intended to be heard. This, however, serves to aid her memory, and to allow her to enter more fully into the varied dramatic phases of her part.

Now she approaches from the end of the hall that is shrouded in shadow, a creature glittering in gold and jewels ; she darts towards me with an indignant air of accusation, and menaces me with expressive gestures that call heaven to witness the magnitude of the crime I have committed.

Then suddenly the bayadère bursts into a fit of mocking laughter ; she overwhelms me with bantering disdain and with extended finger, points me out to the jeering crowd. Her irony is, of course, factitious,

just as were the superb imprecations with which she but lately encompassed me. But it is a marvellous imitation all the same. Her titter and somewhat sad laughter can be heard to resound in her heaving chest, and she laughs with her mouth, her eyes, and her eyebrows, with her bosom, and with her heaving and panting breasts. As she withdraws, shaken with laughter, the effect is irresistible, and one must laugh with her.

She withdraws backwards, as quickly as her little feet will take her, turning away her head in scorn, so that she may no longer see me. But now she returns with slow and solemn step ; these sarcasms were but spite ; her love is too strong, she returns conquered by the sovereign passion, stretching her hands out to me, imploring pardon, and offering her all in a final appeal. And as she again withdraws, with her head thrown back and her half-opened lips that disclose the pearly teeth glimmering beneath the diamonds in her nose, she wishes me to follow her, even seems to command it, she calls me with her arms, her breasts, and her languorous eyes ; she calls me with all her being, as with a loadstone, and for a very little I should follow her almost involuntarily, for I am at last spell-bound by her fascinations. Her promises of love are false, and like her laughter but part of the comedy. One knows it, and indeed it is no worse for that ; perhaps even the knowledge of its unreality only adds a new and malignant charm.

Whilst she acts, a sort of magnetic or invisible bond unites her to those two men who sing in the orchestra, and who, like her, go and come along the human passage ; sometimes advancing, then taking three or four steps backward. They follow her when she comes near me, but are the first to draw back when it is time for her to retire ; they never allow her to escape from out of their sight, and their burning gaze is fixed on her, whilst with widely opened mouths they ever sing in the high falsetto voice of a muezzin. With heads bent forward they, who are tall, look down on

her who is short, and they have the air of being the masters by whom she is inspired and possessed. They seem to guide her with their voices, and to fan her with the flame of their breath like some delicate and glittering butterfly that they have tamed to their will, and there is an unknown something in this that seems perverse and uncanny.

In the less brightly lit place where the orchestra is seated there are two or three other gaily-adorned bayadères who had already danced. One had struck me as being especially strange, a sort of beautiful, poisonous flower; tall and thin, with features that seemed too delicate and eyes that were too long already, without their unnatural lengthening of paint; blue-black hair, stretched in tight bands across the cheeks; drapery that was wholly black, a black girdle and a black veil with the slightest silver edging. Her ornaments consisted of nothing but rubies, rubies that covered hands and arms, and in her nose a bunch of rubies that fell over her mouth, so that the ghoulish lips looked as if a spot of blood had yet remained on them.

But I forgot them all so soon as I saw that one, that queen, that star, make her sudden appearance between the musicians who stood aside to let her pass, that creature all decked in gold who had been kept for the last.

Her dance was long, very long, almost wearisome, yet I dreaded the moment when it would end and I should see her no more.

Once more she repeated her reproaches and that irresistible laugh; once more I felt the mockery of her sparkling eyes and again the evermore despairing calls of love.

At last she ceases and all is over, and I wake up and see the people gathered around, and find myself surrounded once more by the realities of the entertainment organized in my honour.

Before retiring—and it is time—I go to compliment the bayadère. I find her wiping her face with a

delicate handkerchief ; she has been very hot, and the perspiration rolls down her forehead on to her smooth and dusky bust. In a manner that is now correct, cold, and indifferent, the tired and unconcerned comédienne receives my compliments with little bows of mock modesty, little bows made in the Indian style, hiding her face each time with hands on every finger of which she wears diamonds.

What thoughts can there be in the soul of a bayadère of the old race and the pure blood ? the daughter and granddaughter of bayadères, one who has been trained through descent, that has lasted for hundreds and thousands of years, to be a creature of naught but phantasy and pleasure.

## XIII

## WRITTEN ON LEAVING PONDICHERRY

I am leaving Pondicherry to-morrow for the States of Rajputana, where the famine rages, going by way of Nizam. I have hardly spent ten days in our old colony, and am astonished to find that I cannot leave without regret, though I have hitherto borne my Indian partings with the lightest heart. I might even say that this land of Pondicherry has resumed a sway over me. I might say that I have found my old recollections once more. At the moment of my departure I feel the same feeling stirring within me that I experienced in the bygone days of my youth when the time came for me to quit that other decayed old town, Saint Louis of Senegal, where I had spent a whole year.

I had lodged at the hotel, just as any ordinary traveller might do, for there are two hotels at Pondicherry that exist modestly without any visitors. I had chosen the one by the side of the sea, a house of somewhat stately aspect that dated from the foundation of the town, and whose dilapidations were concealed under a coating of whitewash. In view of the

air of abandonment and neglect that prevailed, I entered with some trepidation, and who would have thought that I should become attached to the chance lodging ?

The great and almost bare whitewashed room which I occupied showed plainly the havoc wrought by time, and recalled in a strange and familiar manner that other room which I lived in long ago on the coast of Africa. Green-shuttered windows overlooked the vast plain of the Indian Ocean, whose breezes brought a delicious freshness even during the hottest hours of the day. As in the Creole salons, there were ancient chairs of carved wood, and on a Louis XVI console a clock of the same period, whose persistent ticking told of life and of a soul that was old and worn. All was dried up, worm-eaten and fragile, and I did not dare to sit down too quickly nor to jump into bed hastily. But there was always the same fair weather, blue sky, pure air, and delicious and home-like peace.

Leaning from the windows I could see, besides the shore and the sea, the terraces of some old houses that stood close by. These also called back recollections of Africa, for the roofs were Moorish in style, and the burning sun had riven them with many cracks. From morning till night I am cradled by the sleepy song of a troop of naked Indians who work dreamily in the neighbouring courtyard, and who are occupied in filling mat sacks with grain and spices for the ships.

My room was never closed, neither during the day nor the night, and the beasts of the air made their home with me ; sparrows walked on the mats that covered the floor without ever heeding my presence, and little squirrels, after an inquiring gaze, came in too and ran over the furniture ; and one morning I saw two crows perched on the corner of my mosquito net.

Oh ! how sad and still were these midday hours, when the tropical sun poured down on the silent little streets lying round the house, streets with the strange old-fashioned names. Nothing in my room or my

surroundings served to remind me of modern times ; there was nothing on those lonely terraces or on the wide blue plain of the deserted sea by which I could fix the period, though the deliberation of the men occupied in filling their sacks with corn made me think of some colonial scene of olden times. Then forgetting our hurryings, our eagerness, and our rapid steamers, I fancied myself back in the old days when one came here by the Cape of Good Hope on some shapely and wilful sailing-vessel which travelled with a deliberation that made the distance seem ten times as great.

My regrets, as may be imagined, cannot be very deep ; all will be forgotten to-morrow, driven away by the fleeting images of new and fresh scenes. But nothing that I have already seen in this old India, or that I may yet see, will take such a hold on me as this little corner of old France stranded on the shores of the Gulf of Bengal.

IN FAMISHED INDIA









